THE TEN DECADS

(PATIṞṞUPPATTU)

A. V. SUBRAMANIAN

Tamilnadu
Textbook Society
Madras

TAMILNADU GOVERNMENT'S
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Translator
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PREFATORY NOTE

IT is mainly due to the happy inspiration of the Hon'ble Thiru M. G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of the Government of Tamil Nadu, that the Government of Tamil Nadu have decided to undertake the stupendous task of translating the great Classics of the world into Tamil and the great Tamil Classics into world languages. In fact, the Hon'ble Thiru C. Aranganayagam, the Education Minister to the Government of Tamil Nadu has declared more than once that the Government of Tamil Nadu is prepared to spend any amount in connection with this work of translation and publication. By an order dated 8-5-1978 the Government of Tamil Nadu has constituted an Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Justice S. Maharajan with the following well-known scholars as members:

1. Thiru K. S. Mahadevan,	the then Director of Tamil Development since replaced by his successor,
Dr. M. Nannan.	
2. Dr. S. V. Subramanian,	Director, International Institute of Tamil Studies.
3. Dr. C. Balasubramanian,	Head of the Department of Tamil Language, University of Madras.
4. Dr. C. R. Sarma,	Regional Secretary, Sahitya Academy, Madras.

It is a fact well known to students of literary history that if the French language excels many other languages in its power of articulation, precision of expression and in its capacity for expressing different and delicate nuances of thought and feeling, it is mainly because of the work of thousands of dedicated scholars who, for nearly three centuries, continuously translated Greek, Latin,

German, Spanish and Arabic Classics into the French language and enriched it. If the laudable project of the Government of Tamil Nadu is implemented properly and with gusto, the translations are bound to offer to the Tamils glimpses of a new world of vision and experience, and in the very process of translation, the translators will be amazed to find how the foreign Classics force the Tamil language to speak in new accents and add to Tamil a new dimension of expression. The afflatus of foreign thinkers and poets, the creative breath of their inspirations is bound to further quicken and energise the Tamil language, which, as has been observed by Winslow, is, in its poetic form more polished and exact than Greek. The translations from the foreign classics into Tamil are a wholesome mode of blood-transfusion which can impart a fresh vigour to the Tamil language and strengthen the seeds of its future creativity. With this hope we launch this series of translations.

S. MAHARAJAN
Chairman,
Expert Committee for Translation of Classics,
Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras.

INTRODUCTION

'THE Ten Decads' or 'Patiṟṟuppattu' is a Tamil Sangam Poetical Work written over two thousand years ago. As a treasure-house of valuable information, it is unique; it throws light on the history of the early Chērās, as well as of chieftains in the Chōlā and Pāndyā Countries, about whom also poets like Kapilar and Paranar have composed songs. To the modern Tamils, 'The Ten Decads' has been a closed book, because that work has been written in obscure and abstruse Tamil. A. V. Subramanian, who is a distinguished scholar in English, Tamil and Sanskrit, has done valuable research work in Sangam Literature and his English translation of 'Patiṟṟuppattu', therefore, is welcome both to the Tamils, who are uninitiated in ancient Sangam Tamil, and to the Indologists, who are interested in studying the hitherto obscure history of the early Chērās, Chōlās and Pāndyās.

The translation of A. V. Subramanian is marked by scholarly precision, fidelity, lucidity and readability and commends itself to the readers on its own merits.

I thank my colleagues of the Expert Committee for their generous co-operation in bringing out the publication of this book. The Expert Committee's thanks are due to Thiru R. Kulandaivelu, Managing Director of the Tamilnadu Textbook Society and to his colleagues for the promptness with which they have completed the printing of this book.

S. MAHARAJAN
Chairman,
Expert Committee for translation of
Classics,
Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras.

CONTENTS

	Page
PREFATORY NOTE ..	iii
INTRODUCTION ..	v
INTRODUCTORY ..	vii
A NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF PATIṞṞUPPATTU ..	xiv
PRAYER ..	1
SECOND DECAD ..	2
THIRD DECAD ..	15
FOURTH DECAD ..	27
FIFTH DECAD ..	37
SIXTH DECAD ..	47
SEVENTH DECAD ..	57
EIGHTH DECAD ..	67
NINTH DECAD ..	77

INTRODUCTORY

THE Patiṟṟuppattu semantically signifying a collection of ten poems of ten stanzas each, is among the eight anthologies forming one of the three libraries of the Tamil Sangam Age. The poems are frankly panegyrical: ten poets sing the praise of ten Chērā kings and as the modes of versification have mostly been stylised in the Sangam Era, these poems are very much cast in the type seen commonly and to better advantage in the stanzas in another of the eight anthologies, the Puranānūru. The greatest value of this work consists in its being a historical document on the early Chērās, incidentally throwing considerable light on the poets and their epoch through which by synchronism a wealth of inference can be drawn about the other poets of this Golden Era of Tamil Letters. A note on Patiṟṟuppattu as a historical document has therefore been appended to this introduction.

Notwithstanding all this, the poems constituting the work are good literary pieces having all the qualities of the poetry of the Sangam Age. It is, of course, true that they are wholly panegyrical and lack the high calibre of many of the pieces in the other *Puram* work, Puranānūru. Whatever the qualities of the king, the fact that it is in praise of an individual, places a certain inartistic restraint on the poet; and the poems of the Patiṟṟuppattu consequently rank below those treating of *Aham* and below too the poems in Puranānūru that were not composed in praise of reigning kings.

But it has to be stated in defence of these panegyrists that within the framework of praise they have sought to introduce matter that is of universal interest, that makes the poem of significance to the modern reader. The praise of the king as a great military commander leads on naturally to a description of the battles and of the alliance that stood up against him, of the glorious victory and the tumultuous victory celebration during the course of which quantities of fragrant liquor get consumed and of the very orgy of munificence in which the king in an expansive mood gives away the booty of war to the destitutes who throng his court in supplication. The

poet then turns his attention to the achievements of the king in peace which are no less impressive. The wisdom, the kindness coupled with firmness required of an administrator, the thoughtful consideration for even the subject people of the vanquished enemy kingdoms all come in for adulatory comment.

There is much else that is of interest to the student of history and of sociology in the poems. There are references to contemporary kings and events which may one day help historians to fix the dates of these Chērā kings and therefore of these Sangam poets. There are clear references to ancient rituals which were performed by these kings: the poets praise the great learning of these rulers in ancient lore and the great deference in which their *rajagurus* were held. References to the habits and customs prevalent among the people and to the beliefs relating to the heavenly bodies and their influence on earthly institutions occurring in these poems throw considerable light on the society of the Sangam Age. We find numerous references to the food habits of the people: we notice how food on festive occasions invariably included meat which appears to have been consumed by all without distinction of caste. The Sangam Tamils imbibed liquor but perhaps to moderation: for while we find frequent mention of drinks circulating, we never hear of a man acting under the influence of excessive drink. Liquor was probably consumed by happy men to set an edge on their enjoyment of an occasion, usually a victory over a powerful adversary: men did not drink to drown cares and anxieties and frustrations as in our own neurotic times.

It would be a delightful experience if we accompany these poets of the Patiṟṟuppattu̱ on a tour of the Chērā country. There have been rains recently, the copious showers of the south-west monsoon, and there is lush verdure everywhere. We see the farmers ploughing the land, joyful at the prospect of a bounteous harvest, joyful just at being alive: indeed the merrier among them have plucked the first flowers from the plants growing wild in the water channels and having wreathed them, have wound the multi-coloured garlands round their heads! The countryside is filled with the cheerful noises of pulsating life. Youth is at play at water games and archers at their archery practice: on the road a pair of bulls have got the wheels of a gigantic cart into the mire and the countryside fills with the

shouts of the cartmen urging the bulls to pull them out of the mud. Men fill in the time in the long afternoons by lying in the shade of leafy trees and singing songs of joy. The village trees are bursting with bird life: the little winged things, excited at the quickened current of life that has been set in motion by the torrents of monsoon rain, fill the air with piercing liquid notes.

While the fields are prepared for the paddy crop, we see some fields with a standing crop of sugar-cane: in a corner we also see the crusher and the huge oven and the boiling vat where the sugar-heavy juice shall be processed to yield golden nuggets of jaggery. The cutting of the cane and the boiling of the rich juice are occasions for general celebration where everyone decks himself with the flowers picked from the sugar-cane fields and joy reigns supreme.

We pick our way carefully through the pebbly rising ground taking in the grand view of the mountains behind which a crimson sun is setting. The diligent peasant has raised a crop of millet in the hard unyielding soil of the mountain slope. His hut is thatched with millet hay over which the mountain jasmine spreads its tendrils: its white blossom just opening out perfumes the air of the mountain night with a delicate scent that soothes the senses and calms the mind. The peasant is a hospitable fellow and offers a delicious dish of pounded millet and mountain honey to anyone that crosses his threshold. He variegates his simple diet with venison brought by the huntsman who takes an equal measure of millet in exchange: he also consumes the rich milk of the mountain cow and on joyous occasions turns out a piece de resistance by boiling grains with milk and jaggery which is eaten by all the members of the hill community sitting together in festive groups.

We have crossed the mountains and entered the city a glimpse of which we could see from the top of the range we have left behind. The city bustles with activity and the bazaar presents an animated spectacle. Besides articles of food and clothes from Kalinga we see gold and precious stones offered for sale. Few coins are exchanged and transactions are by barter where the value of a commodity to its owner at the moment of exchange is the determining factor and not a general valuation that is rigid and inflexible as in our own commercial world. For instance behold the warrior who carries aloft

a triumphant piece of ivory which he has plucked from the elphant of an enemy king! The battle has ended in a triumph for his side and what he yearns for most of all is the cup that cheers and inebriates. So he hastens to the liquor shop indicated by the flag it flies and the terms of the barter soon concluded, he quaffs the foaming Hippocrene oblivious of his commercial bloomer in bartering away a precious tusk for a lowly pot of drink!

We see warriors everywhere and when there is a war about, the whole town lives in a state of martial frenzy. We walk on and come to a piece of level ground outside the limits of the city where obviously there has been a fierce skirmish yesterday. It is a fearful sight to see, for headless trunks get up and dance a fearful dance of death: blood has flowed down to the depressions on the battlefield and the current has carried the severed limbs of the fighters fallen to the sword and the javelin and the final touch of the macabre is provided by flocks of hawks which gorge on the moving pieces of flesh carried by the current of blood.

But grievous though the battle has been, it is as nothing when compared to the holocaust that a siege of a famed fort like *Ahappā* can occasion. For this fort of legendary fame is equipped with protective forests and a wide yawning moat teeming with crocodiles to keep away ambitious armies: but if they cross them and lay siege to the fort there are catapults and gears that can throw heavy showers of arrows at them. If elephants try to ram the battlemented doors, there are devices by which the elephants can be brained and the rams riven. Behind the walls stands the army of the fort ready to hurl everything they have at the hapless invaders. Impregnable indeed is *Ahappā*.

The tour of discovery ends in the king's court. We have heard how mighty is the king in battle, how ruthless, how ferocious. But to the poets and even the talentless destitute he is kindness itself and he gives them all a royal welcome. They are treated to a bath and jewels are presented to the women guests and good silken clothes to every one. And then a truly royal feast is spread before them, good rice so well cooked with meat that the dinner cannot tell them apart. Sumptuous side dishes are set before them and pots of fragrant liquor. After dinner the guests sit surrounding the hospitable king who seems to derive great pleasure from their company, while the

inevitable pots of filtered liquor freely circulate. The king who is mighty in war is a great patron of the arts in peace and is too the best friend of the tramp and the vagrant. To him and his graceful queen the highest joy is to give and to give ceaselessly. Often it is found that the rich booty the king had won in the bloody battle of yesterday is all given away by sunset of this day in an orgy of munificence where none that comes is turned away.

Such a tour of discovery through the lines of Patiṟṟuppattu reveals a considerable amount of information about the state of the society of the Chērā land. This is most vauable as there is otherwise a great paucity of source-material about the Sangam Age. But despite such useful bits of information which we can glean from it, it will not be classifiable as literature unless it contains passages of beauty which are important in themselves and not as sources of information. A diligent student does discern such passages in these panegyrical poems. The seventh poem by Paranar contains a memorable description of old towns in the Chērā kingdom, where girls dance in the light cast by tall lamps fed with melted butter, while the citizens talk tirelessly of their king's immortal fame. In the next poem we get a vivid picture of the king and his subjects transporting themselves on the banks of the *Kānchi* river in riotous water festivities: their life is described in very felicitous language and the reader is left with a joyful picture of clean-minded men and women all imbued with a holiday spirit.

In the first poem by the only lady bard, we get a very happy portrayal of a sea-shore scene. The poetess with a meticulous eye for detail draws the reader's attention to the thin lines traced by the legs of the ungainly crab which are partly filled up by the grains of fine sand wafted by the persistent breeze. The passage is so faithful and vivid the reader feels he can smell the odoriferous breeze and hear the raucous gull.

Poetry in essence should capture human emotions and reproduce them in a setting of art. Nacchellaiyār's second poem deals with the sudden flaring up of the queen's temper when the king, carried away by the excitement of the moment catches hold of the hands of girls and dances with a merry abandon locked in a chain with them. The queen walks off green with jealousy and a passage ensues where a red *kuvaḷai* flower becomes the bone of contention between the

royal couple, now estranged for the moment by a lover's tiff. It is a beautiful scene, the most beautiful in all the work: and the grateful reader is left to admire the dexterity of the poetess who makes an insignificant object like the flower the apparent central pivotal point of the whole conflict—a device not unknown in Tamil literature but seldom better applied than in this poem.

The device of contrast is often employed by the poets of this work to produce artistically memorable impressions: the prosperity of the lands under the Chērā's rule is contrasted starkly with the barrenness of the lands whose kings had incurred the Chērā's anger. In a few places this is certainly overdone and the modern reader is repelled by the passages portraying an uncivilised fury let loose on the hapless lands of the vanquished people. But we have to judge each age by the norms and standards of that age and it will be supercilious on our part if we condemn practices which were sanctioned by the heroes' code. There are other contrasts too that strike the discerning reader: life in the four types of land is compared and the simple life of the mountain peasants very artistically contrasted with the complex web of commercial and social life in the capital city of the king. The king's passion for war and the rigours of camp life and the remorseless cut and thrust of the battlefield is presented in contrast with his love of the handsome queen and the soft pleasures of palace life.

The insignia of a true poet is the being inspired by an ideal, the being impelled to give a message to mankind. It is the credo that distinguishes the true poet from a mere elegant versifier. The poets of the Patiṟṟuppattu were steadfastly attached to the ideal of the king as the protector of the people. They paint vivid pictures of the great qualities of kingship they have discovered in their patron kings. Often they appear to be contradictory pairs of qualities, like firmness and kindness but they could and must co-exist in a king and in fact in all administrators in all ages. Pālai Gautamanār lays particular stress on these qualities and there is a very noble passage in praise of them in poem 22.

These poets were certainly panegyrists who praised kings and received incredibly generous presents from them. But their acclaim was certainly not bought for money: they were not commercial artists whose products were sold over the counter. Poets like Kapilar

and Paranar repudiated wealth when they discovered that its acceptance would involve a compromise on principles: there are far too many instances relating to these very poets in Puranānūru for any one to have doubts in the matter. Poets like Kapilar enjoyed such a high reputation in that age of cultural sensibility, they would have been welcome in any royal court: crowned heads knew they had been honoured if Kapilar paid them a visit. The truth is that the poets chose these Chērā kings for their great qualities and adopted them as their patrons: therefore they could sing their praise without any qualms of conscience. Kapilar in fact displays a poor commercial sense when standing before Selvakkadungō, he begins to praise Pāri who is no more. A more astute person in his position would have lost no time in currying the Chērā's favour and if it becomes necessary he would even talk lightly of his old patron now deceased. The point need not be further laboured: these panegyrists were not unscrupulous courtiers urged by avarice, they were independent men of genius who had a uniquely noble role to play, who, in utter fearlessness, could remonstrate with an erring monarch and firmly set him on the road to rectitude.

A word regarding the translation will not be out of place. If the poems of this work are regarded as pre-eminently literary in value, the translation should be in verse. Only a verse transcomposition could begin to capture some part of the spirit of the original and create a poetic impact on the reader. But the best part of the significance of these poems consists in their value as a historical document portraying the lives and times of the early Chērās. While a certain amount of research has been carried out by Tamil researchers on these Chērās with the help of these poems a great deal remains to be done and it is widely admitted that a fairly faithful translation in English would stimulate much-needed research in the field. In view of the historical value of these poems it was decided to render their translation in prose rather than in verse in order that the fewest liberties are taken with the material of the work.

The translator, however, hopes that the poetic spirit of the original has not wholly been lost in the process of translation. And to aid the reader in reconstructing the Classic Age in his mind a slight lilt has been introduced into the prose to rescue it from everyday banality.

A. V. SUBRAMANIAN

A NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF PATIṘṘUPPATTU̲

WHILE many Sangam works contain panegyrical poems on Tamil kings Patiṙṙuppattu̲ is the only one solely devoted to such panegyrical exercise; another feature of this unique work is that it treats only of Chērā kings. From its plan it can be seen that it treats of ten Chērā kings on whom as many poets have composed laudatory poems; unfortunately, however, only eight of these have come down to us or a total of eighty pieces. It is not known where the lost decads were originally fitted in: it was generally assumed till recently that they were the first and the last decads but doubts have been raised by researchers like John R. Marr which make it difficult for us to accept this theory as conclusively proven. Nor is it known who these two kings were and which poets panegyrised them: the discovery of the lost decads and the determination of these factual details await the labours of a dedicated scholar-historian of the future.

The eight kings of this work belong to two different Chērā lines— the Utiyanchēral and the Antuvanchēral Irumporai. The first five kings belong to the first of these two lines and are related to one another in this manner: Palyānaicchelkezhu Kuttuvan is the younger brother of Imayavaramban and the other three are Imayavaramban's children. The last three kings of this work belong to the second line and the seventh is the son of the sixth and the eighth, the son of the seventh king.

The work contains some references to place names and names of kings, queens and in some places nobles and even enemy chieftains. There are references to practices like the performance of sacrifices, the worship of a Goddess of war residing in the battle-drum, and the donation of land to court-poets free of land tax: there are exalted passages where the qualities required in a king and the duties he is expected to discharge are set forth. Side by side with the sanguinary exploits of war-like princes can be seen the delightful accounts of farmers and the hill-folk pursuing their less glamorous

avocations. We find references to astronomy and the heavenly bodies and the influence they have on the world of men. There are detailed descriptions of warfare and sieges of forts and the arms employed in defence and offence. Each decad has an annexure called *Patikam* obviously composed by a later poet giving consider able biographical detail about the patron-king and the panegyrist-poet. All this constitutes historical wealth and researchers like Thiru Sadāsiva Pandārathār delved deep into it: much that we know about the early Chērās we owe to the tireless work of these researchers who have plundered this great poem for its wealth of historical detail.

But, while it should be conceded this work has helped us a great deal in unraveling the mysteries of the past history of the Chērās, many puzzling points still remain. There are some conclusions drawn from the Patiṙṙuppattu which seem to run counter to the facts and images established on the basis of other works. To cite only one example, it was generally assumed on the basis of the fifth decad that the Kuttuvan figuring in it is none other than the Senguttuvan of Silapadikāram, the elder brother of the author Iḷangō. But keen-minded thinkers like Thiru A. S. Gnānasambandhan have shown how this is impossible: one of the greatest exploits of Senguttuvan of Silapadikāram is his conquest of the Aryan north and the fact that this is totally omitted in the ten poems of the fifth decad throws considerable doubt on the theory of the identity of the two monarchs.

One other difficulty is on account of the assumption in the *Patikams* that these eight kings ruled the Chērā land successively, some of them for as long as fifty years and more. For many of the poets who have sung about them in Patiṙṙuppattu have panegyrised other Chērā kings in Puranānūru: and if the *Patikams* are assumed as true, we are led to absurd conclusions: for instance, four of these eight poets must certainly be contemporaries as all of them have sung of Bēkan the philanthropist: and since the kings of Patiṙṙuppattu they panegyrised ruled for long periods, and they all ruled successively and no two simultaneously according to the *Patikams*, the first and the last of these four poets must be separated by a period of a hundred years! The crowning absurdity is that some of the poets should have lived upto to the ripe old age of 100 and more

and atleast two of them should have been actively moving about crossing the mountains and composing poetry, long after they reached 100 years of age! Some of the poets of Patiṟṟuppattu like Kapilar and Paranar and Nacchellaiyār are at the very top of the echelon of Sangam poets in regard to the quality of their work. Discerning critics who go through the poems in Patiṟṟuppattu ascribed to them by these *Patikams* (for there is no other evidence to prove their authorship than these *Patikams*) will not find that degree of imagination, that sure-footed felicity of diction in them that they enjoy in the other works grouped under the eight anthologies. There is a difference of literary quality between the poems ascribed to them in Patiṟṟuppattu and even the purely panegyrical pieces composed by the same poets which we find in the Puranāṉūru. There is therefore an extreme view held by some intelligent thinkers that the *Patikams* are unreliable and should be wholly discarded as historical documents.

It would be clear from the brief review of the position that a great deal remains to be done in the matter of the history of the early Chērā kings. It is hoped that the research in this important field will receive a certain stimulus by the publication of this, the first English translation of Patiṟṟuppattu. The translator can indeed hope for no higher reward than that.

A. V. SUBRAMANIAN

PRAYER

THE Lord of time glows red like a fire. He wears a garland of *konrai* blooms which dangles gracefully on his chest. The Lord is armed with the bow that burnt the three cities of the death-defying demons. On nights He dances in the burning ghats: during the dance His matted hair falls dishevelled covering all the expanse of his back. The silver bells worn by Him hitting against His thighs during the dance emit a pleasant festive note. Even while dancing, His fingers strum the small drum that is wound with the finest thread.

The Lord shows in His handsome person both the male and the female form with the ear-ornaments appropriate to both the sexes. He wears the crescent waxing moon on His forehead and He displays on His neck a stain darker than the *kaḷam* fruit. He wields many shining weapons, chief among which is the three-pronged strident.

Such is the Lord of time: may He was triumphant!

SECOND DECAD

PATHIKAM

KAṆṆANĀR OF KUMATTŪR composed these ten poems on Imayavaramban Nedunchēralādan who was born of Veḷiyan Vēnmāl Nallini and Udiyan Chēran of wide-spread fame and of spotless conduct and veracity who possessed a sweet-toned wardrum. Nedunchēralādan conquered all the lands in the country and ruled gloriously over this great empire with the seas as its borders. He went up on his conquering tour even to the Himalayas of perennially cascading streams and carved his bow symbol on the mountain slope. He subjugated the Aryans of traditional glory: he worsted the Yavanas of crude, violent speech and tied their hands behind them and poured ghee over their heads. They were freed by him only on payment of invaluable jewels and diamonds which he brought to his capital city, a redoubtable stronghold where he distributed them to all who were in need of help. Such was the king's valour which crushed all those that did not bow down to him. The king gave the learned poet 500 villages as largess as well as a share of the revenues of the southern part for thirty-eight years.

Imayavaramban Nedunchēralādan ruled for fifty-eight years.

11

O CHERALĀDA! your unchecked armies always wage war in strict accord with all the tenets of the moral code. You now sit quaffing the fragrant liquor that was strained with the bark of the plantain tree, to commemorate the great victory in the battle with the fierce Kadambās. How was it won — let me recount the Saga.

On your ascending the Chērā throne you led your army all over the land, even upto the vaulting Himalayas, the range of mountains with snowy summits. These famous mountains where the Aryans flourish are the haunts of the deer with the hairy tail which sleep

under the verdant *murungai* trees dreaming of the rich, succulent grass which grows on the banks of the waterfalls that cascade down the mountain slopes. At the end of the campaign all the turbulent kings in the entire stretch of the wide country between the northern range and the southern Cape came under your sway, their martial pride utterly crushed by the might of your arms.

Your most notable martial feat is the subjugation of the Kadambās. During the battle, your corps of fencers wielding sharp, pointed swords pierced the robust Kadambās' chests. And the blood that gushed forth from their wounds flowed down the giant encircling moat, turning its water of a gem-blue colour bright crimson like *kum-kum* paste.

Then you fought your way to their protected tree and vanquishing the many guards you cut the tree down, root and branch as the crowning act of a heroic career. And as the trophy of your great victory, you fashioned a drum from out of the tree, to commemorate your martial triumph.

At the end of this great campaign you sit on the royal elephant's back, yourself wearing a long garland while the animal is decked with golden flowers; the elephant of faultless features annexed great glory in the recent battle by goring the enemy with its tusk. The scene, O King, fills me with rapture.

The scene reminds one of the powerful Muruga who rode his elephant at the triumphant end of the great battle with the cruel demons who loved transgressing the moral law. Their king and leader Suravanma took the form of a mighty tree and hid himself in the dusky heart of the restless sea whose resounding waves rise like a range of lofty mountains to get dissipated by the constant wind into droplets of a silvery gleam. Muruga the warrior of everlasting fame went forth, his fury fully roused, and cut down the mighty demon-tree, crushing the might of the evil brood.

Your victory recalls to our minds Muruga's triumph, O Chēralāda! you appear resplendent with a wreath of faultless gems of the finest ray. You scent the air with the sweet bouquet of liquor quaffed in the battle camp.

These things, symbolic of your might and your matchless prosperity fill my heart with boundless rapture. May these endure for ever more!

12

O KING, your martial valour is matched only by your generous heart.

The Kadambā king with the aid of his kinsmen had warred on the kings of neighbouring lands routing them all in bloody battles. In these victories of the Kadambā king his skilled fencers had played a mighty part. You humbled this king, you made him quake, you cut down his prized protected tree. At the mention of your name, O King, the princes of the earth who live in mansions of dazzling splendour where drums resound toss in their beds and tremble with fear, even as the beasts in the mountain sides which herd together quake in fear before the king of the jungle who roams the slopes, awe-inspiring with his fiery mane, and his prehensile claws in his powerful paws.

The fame of your valour has spread far and wide. It reached my ears and keen to feast my eager eyes on your royal person, I have come to your palace with all my kinsmen, crossing the rugged mountain slopes—the mountain slopes where the cow elephant whisks off with a switch of her hairy tail the bees which, swarming, annoy her mate, the youthful bull, while locked with her calf in a close embrace of motherly love.

The lack of food over a long period had sharpened our keen appetite, but the things your men set before us! There was succulent meat with a layer of fat, white in colour and cut with knives and the whitest rice cooked with mutton and flavoured liquor to sip with it...

We fell on the viands and ate with zest. Replete with food and flavoured drinks, we changed to silks discarding the rags which long had soiled and now were damp—rags which looked like the dripping feathers of an eagle that had flown through driving rain. Your female guests with curly hair and shoulders resembling curved

bamboos, my kinswomen, of spotless conduct were offered priceless ornaments! And thus arrayed we stood before you, beaming members of a happy throng.

The scene before me fills my heart with exquisite pleasure O Chēralāda! I feel transported at the thought of your matchless valour in the field of battle and your munificence in times of peace.

13

CHĒRALĀDA! There are lands beyond your old boundaries, which were rich, fertile, where bumper crops were always grown. After the harvest, these lands beyond were so over-grown with luscious grass, cattle foraged for food in them. Then these lands would be so filled with water (by the farmers for sowing the paddy crop) the *āral* fish could play about and bounteous crops of rice were grown. The grain fields did not need the plough as herds of wild boar had dug them deep and in the lands where sugar-cane grew the *neidal* blossomed everywhere — tempting forage for the wide-eyed buffaloes! When young maidens in leafy dresses had danced merrily in the village square, the leaves they had shed were easy fodder for the aged bulls with heads bent down too old to graze with the village herds. There were stately palms and verdant trees where noisy birds had built their nests, and lotus ponds with channels branching.

This land of plenty, sung by poets, through its conduct provoked your anger. You marched at the head of a valorous army and camped in the lands of these enemy kings. Your fame as a warrior struck such fear in the hearts of the people of the enemy's lands that in utter panic they fled their homes.

Even as the body of a dying man is belaboured by the God of Death, the hapless lands were harried by you. The foes were beaten, their armies crushed, there was arson and pillage in all the land. The smiling land of the enemy king, after the orgies of your pillaging men lost its bloom and turned a desert. Smiling fields where a sugar-cane crop flourished before were now in ruins. The *thērai* trees with their twisted fruit and the gaunt and dusky *udai* trees

lent an air of desolation. Goblin women, their hair dishevelled, had merry rides on vampire backs. Where smiling crops of paddy stood, grew the thistle and the prickly pear. The ashes from the burning fields where raged the fiercest skirmishes settled over the countryside. The fitful traveller was struck with fear when, through the jungle he picked his way where once there stood the bustling village!

But what a picture your kingdom presents, the land that lies under your protecting care! Your rule is so just, so impartial, in such accord with the moral law, that Venus and the ruddy Mars never come together in the firmament to portend evil for the world below. The sequel is all that can be wished for — timely rains and plenty of them and prosperity all over the land. The forests offer peaceful shelter for all the austere ascetics, while in the country, in happy homes live the farmers with their handsome wives — farmers who once were fierce fighters, who having laid their bow aside, now wield the sickle and the plough. You have made the highways safe and through them flows the trade of the land. The farmer and the trader hold an honoured place in society. Gone is hunger, gone are the plagues, banished for ever from your kingdom. And under your able captaincy, peace and plenty have bloomed apace!

14

O KING of the far flung Chērā lands! Liberal patron of the female singers and the relentless ploughman of the battlefield! You lead a mighty corps of elephants and an army that aloft holds its flag, symbolising ceaseless triumphs! Your greatness is such it cannot be measured even like the land and the shoreless sea, the constant wind and the sky above. You are effulgent with the combined light of the stars and the planets and the moon and the sun! In the matter of giving you are like Akkura, the ultimate in dauntless valour and the ally of the Kauravas, mighty in war.

The doughty warriors fully trained in the advanced *Tumbai* form of battle, fighting at their best, these enemy's men, these votaries of the deity of war, get humbled by you, O warlike King! Not content, yet with all this fighting, you long for more such exercise! Undismayed, you can hold your own, even if the wrath-

ful God of Death comes down on you, full of battle; you will grapple with him with such courage he will be forced to flee the field of battle! You are so bold, so selflessly brave you serve as the armour for your own fighters. Your chest, the favoured habitat of the Goddess of wealth is richly decked with the crest gold of seven vanquished kings; how long and powerful are your arms!

The queen by your side with her dressed up hair that draws to it great swarms of bees, set off by several shining jewels — whose wisps of hair behind her ears are lighted up by her ear-rings — this queen provokes among the maids of heaven contests to match her in her comeliness!

Your forebears flaunting jewels of gold set with gems of the purest ray ruled the far-flung Tamil land in the days of yore: may you, like them, be spared to rule the Chērā land for endless years, in all abundance with the fame that lasts for evermore!

15

O CHĒRALĀDA whose martial elephants appear with tusks with broken-off tips through the ramming of the foemen's rampart gates! Your armies came down on the foemen's land like a flood from the open gates of Hell! They scattered their armour and ruined their fort whose walls went up so high in the sky, rain-bearing clouds used to settle on them. While the kings in the safety of their secret camps in anxious fever to know their fate played the dice to read in panic worse disasters in the days to come, you encamp in their doomed lands and spread pillage and ruin everywhere. The fires started by your triumphant men in the towns hard by the fields of battle fiercely burning belch out smoke which gets dissipated in the constant wind.

All is burnt; only ashes remain; your men have changed the face of the land. Such dauntless valour should teach the foes to bow down before you in meek submission. But still there are some who will not learn and the tragic sequel I have seen! Their land is covered with the creeper and wild gourds flourish and in the channels dry the *kānthaḷ* tuber grows apace! In the hamlets of the barren desert live the fierce highway-men in cheerless huts with

palm-leaf roofs, their only aims loot and carnage, their only chattels the stringed bow and arrows with the stench of rotting flesh!

Your own country under your benign rule is all astir with a vaulting boom in the produce of the sea and the produce of the hills and the plenty of the fertile riverine plains. The villages of your land echo to the sound of the endless drum of festivals. In the festooned bazaars of your teeming towns, gold is stored and bought and sold. You are the protector of the fighting men who proclaim your triumphs and your generous heart by beating on the drums that reverberate. You are the support of the skilled artistes that eagerly throng your royal court. Your subjects, freed from fear of foes lead abundant lives: they abjure lies and control their senses and their mind, their conduct conforming to the moral law, as they dread the fruits of a misspent life. They are agog to do what is good and their kinsmen also follow suit, carefully abjuring social wrongs. Your subjects leading happy lives freed from the grip of fell disease praise your benign protectorship.

Throngs of songsters who have wined and dined not very wisely but too well, with their bags chockfull of harps and lutes, in words rendered indistinct with what they had eaten and what they had drunk, wish you a long life for the sake of your subjects whose happiness depends on your personal stewardship — words set to music which I heard with a sense of awe and wonderment.

My astonishment is further fed by the generous way you share your pelf with those of your land that are down and out. All those in need, whether they are gifted poets or wholly giftless but destitute receive succour at your hands: none that comes in supplication is turned away from your door. But from out of them your unerring eyes can spot the specially gifted men of spotless conduct and moral values who receive the most generous largess.

Your protector's role reminds all of God Thirumāl, O happy king who presides over a joyful land! Great is my fortune that I, this day, having seen the lands of your vanquished foes have feasted my eyes on yours too!

16

I HAVE come to see you in your army camp, O mighty King! This visit of mine was prompted by my misgivings — you have tarried long over your martial sally and the love-lorn queen you have left behind, pines away disconsolate.

Your zealous pursuit of martial glory is manifest in the state of your men and the armament I see around you. Your elephants appear more like pigs with their shortened tusks — their tips were broken in their spirited attempts to ram the doors of the ramparts of the enemy king. The young elephants which in their fury pulled down the logs of the foeman's forts now exude rut and loudly trumpet, resentful at their chained-up state.

The cunning enemy was all prepared to meet the might of your armed thrusts. He had designed with consummate skill the outer ramparts of his fort, to fill in the gaps in the mountain range. Impregnable was the foeman's fort: the middle walls designed with clefts to receive the bows from which to shoot: the inner walls had been reinforced with stout and doughty seasoned timber and the doors strengthened with logs of wood designed to withstand elephants' thrusts.

But you took on these mighty foes, battered the rampart and took the fort. Not all the wiles of the crafty foe could withstand the drive of your doughty men. The fort is fallen, the enemy crushed, but still you tarry. You do not return to the comforts of home and the love of the queen! But the queen in anguish for long has been pining away for the quick return of the king, her lord from his martial sally.

How sad is she, the sorrowing queen, who, withal, is soft, subdued (she never trumpets her chastity)! She is by nature so restrained she utters sweetly with a pleasant smile even when there is a lover's tiff! What a handsome lady is your queen — her mouth is so red and filled with nectar; her frank eyes manifest her love-lorn heart; she has a lustrous forehead and a graceful gait.

Your consorts decked with jewels of gold, flawless, pure and of dazzling hue, set with sapphires and diamonds bright, lending

lustre to their handsome person — ladies of the harem of blameless conduct — all are athirst for your hero's chest — its broad expanse is the habitat of Thiru, the deity of prosperity, decked with the crest gold of seven worsted kings; they long for your chest on which to lie as an ample mattress for nights of sleep!

But while you keep them sweet company all the time you stay at home, you have the grit and the firm resolve not to think of their misery during your stay in the army camp!

Enough of this, O Chērā King, take pity at the anguish of the queen at home and return to her to wipe her tears!

17

O KING, you marched against the bad Kadambās and crossing the dusky seas whose waves break into spume when they meet your boats, you worsted them in a fearful battle; and you cut down their prized protected tree. Out of this was fashioned a drum as the priceless trophy of your martial feat. Your fighters on their return home paid the heroes' homage to this drum with sacrificial offerings.

They then struck it at its treated patch, black in colour, with powerful sticks, raising a mighty thunderous din that all the world might at once know how brave in war their king had been. Harassed people heard the drum — men in despair who long had been seeking a haven, a spot of shade from the relentless fire of evil forces — they came thronging, these harried men, their eager eyes on the umbrella of the blameless clan of the Chērā kings.

This white umbrella, spreading wide, that rises high to the vaulting sky where gusts of wind disperse the clouds, the insignia of spotless fame puts to rout the gathering gloom, as the sun's rival with its dazzling lustre. The shade of this umbrella is widely known as the one refuge for harassed people, O King with the jewelled hero's chest and the discerning patron of the female minstrels!

Amongst your foes there are some, O King, that are guilty of the most grievous faults; and many and deep as their sins have

been you forgive them all and in great forbearance you accept tribute from these penitent kings when they offer it in meek submission. Truly unmatched, O King, is your grace!

18

KINSMEN, songsters and sister minstrels! Those among you that are far too famished, help yourselves to these pots of liquor! Others may cook these mounds of rice: some can help by cutting up these slabs of meat and yet others boil vegetables for the side dishes. Songstresses, whose glossy tresses which slip out of the twisted plaits and show up around the graceful ears are loosely dressed into five pigtails, handsome ladies with well-formed hips and an ever-present smile on your ruby lips, youthful and full of feminine graces, engage yourselves in cooking the food, with your gold jewels tinkling with every movement. For all those who come should have enough food and none that comes should be turned away. Let us gift to the suppliants not merely food but all we have got as presents from the generous king. Friends, it is not improvidence thus to give away what we have got. Even if the cool rain-bearing clouds whose mission is to purvey to all the world change their nature and fail to give the rains that succour all living things and drought raises its ugly head and kills off hordes of men and beasts, Chēralāda never fails his suppliants in destitution: he fulfils their every desire, and none that comes is turned away.

19

YOU are not tired of the battlefield even after all those feats of strength that have made your name justly feared; you aspire for more such sallies. Neither are your men tired of fighting. Your sapper corps that gorges on the food supplies which have been looted only wishing to be on the move lay passable roads on the stony ground and cut wide pathways in the desert. Your fighters wearing carved bangles on their feet which never retreat — these heroes fill in their idle time drawing their impatient swords from their sheaths of leopard skin and sharpening them to a finer point. Keen to enter the bloody fray your men pay the heroes' homage to their main drum of the battlefield before which they spread the red millet, that is counted among the staple grains mixed with blood

from the sacrifice; they smear blood over the treated patch and muscle-bound drummers wielding sticks with powerful flexing of their shoulder muscles beat the drum and raise a din. With your kinsmen who still keep on the band on their wrists tied by them to stop their weapons from slipping off — the band that was tied before the last skirmish — you sit at the head of all these forces examining arrows with minute care and you exude a love of war which impregnates all your camp.

In the meantime your queen at home who somehow passes the day-light hours tosses sleepless in her painful bed and pines away for your company. The only solace for the queen can be when she is blessed with sleep for a brief hour and you appear in all her dreams! She keeps alive in all her grief drawing solace from these dream meetings! The queen possessed of all womanly virtues now is filled with shame occasioned by the talk that goes round in the town which draws sustenance from the state of her utter emaciation. A thousand pities that you have left behind your handsome queen with the lustrous forehead to suffer thus, without a thought of her!

But what is at present holding up your return to your capital town? All the lands of your enemy kings stand devastated, barren, bare. The residents of those lands have fled in great hordes in utter panic and their herds of cattle are running loose; their ploughs and spades are abandoned and the lands once fertile are now bare. The foemen cannot rally round and win back their lands from your powerful hands: none in their kingdoms can secure a living, such is the terror your rule inspires!

The ruddy lotus and the lily bloomed in all the ponds in the countryside and in the fields where paddy grew the *neidal* put forth its dusky blossom! The sickle lay, its edge blunted and the receptable for the sugar-cane juice by constant use had got dented; such was the level of their former pelf; but all is ruined beyond repair. Men lament at this sad decay and wring their hands in misery and sigh for the days of prosperity that had blessed the land over long epochs; such is the havoc wrought by you in your triumphant campaigns, O mighty King! So what keeps you in battle camp from the comforts of home and the warmth of the queen?

20

WHEN I am asked by those around me, 'Who may your lord and master be?' I reply with pride, 'The one that braved the dusky sea to get to the island where the defiant Kadambās reigned supreme and worsted them in a fierce battle and utterly destroyed their protected tree. The hallowed name of this angry prince of awesome might is ChērALāda : may he reign for long, victorious!'

The evil designs of foemen kings turn out to be of as little weight as the specks of dust that float in a sunbeam, undone by the acts of the Chērā king who, withal scorns all duplicity even in his dealings with those that act like friends in his presence but do not know that blooming of the heart that friendship knows. He ranges the country with a confident stride and the rebel kings are on the run; those that try to make a stand are routed and their corps of elephants with tinkling bells and all in rut trumpets in panic and flees the field; he occupies their extensive realms. The fame of his mighty victory is sung by poets who all receive limitless largess from the generous king; and both the types of showmen who come are gifted horses with crests that move in a graceful fashion when they run and elephants too and chariots, given away without keeping back anything for the king's own use.

In the siege of the fortress of the foeman king, he destroyed the surrounding protective woods, crossed the yawning moat and battered the strongly reinforced outer wall and the inner wall with holes for bows, impassable barriers, every one: he burnt the city that fell to him and the smoke from the burning city walls scorched the garlands on his chest swelling with the pride of a triumphant warrior.

He draws to himself all kinds of people — poets and actors, bards and dancers; he gives to all and denies none, alike to the gifted artiste and to the craftsman who plies his trade without the spark of artistry. Such is the king's generous mien, the destitutes are never denied though the rain clouds cool with the load of water fail to give for long years together and people perish of the ruthless drought. Even in such unhappy times the Chērā gives without restraint and all his suppliants go replete. So, blessed is the royal mother from whose womb the king has sprung!

THIRD DECAD

PATHIKAM

PALYĀNAICCHELKEZU KUTTUVAN, the younger brother of Imayavaramban brought the *Umbarkādu* secure under his sceptre and having taken the *Ahappā* he performed the fire sacrifice. And in a gesture of enlightened sympathy he shared his Kingdom with his elders in his own clan. He built up a very big elephant corps and (through the medium of these elephants) he could bathe in the water of two oceans on the same day. He worshipped the family Goddess in the *Ayirai* hill. Then at the end of a heroic life full of martial exploits, he renounced material life and went to the forest in the wake of Nedumbāradāyanār of reputed scholarship, and undying fame. Pālai Goutamanār sang these ten songs in his praise. The largess he got was this: when urged to demand what he wanted he said, 'I and my wife should go to heaven.' Then elderly scholars were consulted and the poet was provided with the wherewithal to perform nine big sacrifices. At the tenth big sacrifice, they suddenly missed the brahmin poet and his wife (they had ascended to the heaven).

Palyānaicchelkezu Kuttuvan, the brother of Imayavaramban ruled for twenty-five years.

21

O HERO of heroes, your martial triumphs have enriched the land with jewels of gold given by vassals as tribute to you when at the head of an elephant corps and your men exultant, drunk, you marched against them to the beat of drums. Two kinds of smoke arise, O King! from the habitations of your citizens. One is the sacred smoke from the offerings poured in the fire by the pious men to honour the saintly ascetics whose mien inspires awe and reverence through their resolve so firmly held never to harm any living thing and their steadfast adherence to the truth, in the manner of the rising sun. These pious performers of the sacrifice have learnt the

five branches of ritual lore, that of the word and of its meaning, astrology and the scriptural tenets and the detailed rules and procedure governing the conduct of the fire sacrifice. With the knowledge of these branches of ritual lore they perform the fire sacrifice, with the tongues of flame that stimulate the deep-felt longings of the performers, that come out manifest on their persons.

The other smoke has as its source, the homes of sheep dealers: when they have guests, they welcome them with effusive warmth and they proceed to cook a lavish feast. They cut the meat with its coat of fat into small bits on the mincing frame and cook a dish to which are added tasty spices fried in ghee with the sound of the tossing waves of the sea: the savoury smoke, when ghee is added, rises from the prosperous homes to mix with the smoke from the ritual offerings filling with longing even the Gods.

You offer to the poor great pots of liquor-gifts showered on them even as the rains and jewels of gold obtained as booty from the battlefield of your signal triumph where your elephant corps skilled in war marched to the tune of your main war drum, that is covered with hide and won the battle amidst scenes of din: your pelf is great your fame unstained, your chest perfumed by an unguent of sandal paste!

Protective armour of the warlike men who wear head-wreaths in great profusion to symbolise their martial valour! Lord of *Pūzhi* with the *Seruppu* hill, where the cowherds spread their myriad cattle wearing wreaths of the *mullai* on their heads! And lo! the wonder! these cowherds find priceless gems of the purest ray in the forests marked by lofty boulders! Lord of the stately *Ayirai* hill, that checks the fiery foemen's march over your far-famed land of plenty, nor whose steep sides can be climbed even along the bed of the gushing streams! The forests of the mountain slopes and even the summit that scrapes the sky yield bumper harvests of grain and fruit! While you rule, the rains never fail and all your country is in bloom. Your subjects live abundant lives free from hunger and fell disease.

May you live for countless aeons! May it be granted that you and your queen are never separated all your lives. Your queen's

hair smells surpassing sweet without the aid of cosmetics! Her long and richly glossy tresses smell of the *mullai* blooms, when dressed; her handsome face is lighted up by a pair of roving pretty eyes cool like flowers with stems removed, that are in bloom even of nights and whose big and shapely shoulders remind all those that look on her of bamboo growing on the banks of a river that flows full stream with *kānthal* growing.

22

SCION of a race of benevolent Kings! Your ideal has been the golden mean between excessive softness and extreme rigour; steering clear of unreined passions, you hold up truth and eschew fear: you guard yourself against discrimination: you have no foes, no favourites. You repress all the evil factors that stand in the way of good government. You reign over a land of well-meaning men who believe in always doing good, who do not covet the neighbours' goods, who, propelled by the dictates of the moral law, share what they have with those in need and untroubled by senility or the depredations of fell disease and never separated from their life's partners live the happy lives of the truly good.

Your martial feats are no less great: you marched on the neighbouring *Kongu* land whose people live by tending cattle where water is dear and the soil hard, where an eager herd of thirsty cows press round a well where yards of rope bring up a pail of the precious fluid, — the well that has been dug with axes made of iron to break the rocks that a fitful supply may be coaxed from out of the hole with a narrow mouth! Your fighting men wield javelins, your horses come with waving crests, your elephants display golden jewels and your chariots are fitted with hanging curtains.

The eager army thrusting forward is all intent to take the fort. The foemen however are all ready with timber buttress for the walls fitted with all the gear that throws a shower of arrows at the foes. The fort is guarded all the time by soldiers who, themselves concealed, can fight the men that lay the siege. It is further made impregnable by protective forests and yawning moats and catapults and booby traps and a device by which the elephants that ram the door can be brained and riven. Your men ram the buttressed gates,

silence all the fighting gear and take by force the fort *Ahappā* celebrated in all the ballads. Such was the mighty deed, O King, in token whereof, around your neck, you wear a necklace of golden blooms, the *uzhingnai* that symbolises surpassing valour in the field of battle!

Your march of conquest proceeds apace: your men annex the fertile lands where the noise of men at water games rose above the din of those who trained themselves in archery, where the rolling floods in the wide rivers were checked by the tireless labour of peasants summoned by the noise of leather-bound drums, prosperous lands where men foregathered for the fun and frolic of festivities. These doomed lands of vanquished foes who happened to incur your rising wrath are so deserted, jackals roam howling out of the pangs of hunger when the sun that set in the western sea, rises in the east and climbing the heavens dispels the well-spread gloom from the earth, when this great beneficent force, burns at his fiercest from the mid-heavens, the big-eyed female goblins dance to the fitful tunes of jungle owls whose eyes goggle: how sad and dreary, how bleak is the lot of these once-fertile lands!

23

WHEN the rains fail and all the land is caught in the grip of a ruthless drought and crops wither and hunger stalks when even the crickets feel the pinch and sing out their woe from many a hole in the *unnam* trees with dried up leaves, come artiste bands with their instruments tucked away in a capacious bag. They announce themselves at the village square by playing music: they then repair to the porches of the houses and play music, intent on earning a little food. You hear these musicians, O Kuttuva! and gathering them in your own place, you ply them with rich food and with wine. You yourself have little of it but you eat and drink in their company. The hungry guests are now replete and have been presented with gold jewels and the food and wine and the largess given and above all your kind patronage put gay abandon in their hearts; they sing and dance for sheer joy.

But what of your valour and armed might, O Kuttuva! with the golden wreath? The land ruled over by the enemy king was fertile,

productive; the river banks with a large expanse of sandy bed were cool with the shade of the *marutham* trees where birds had made a happy home: the *kānchi* trees were all in shambles wrecked by the girls who picked the flowers. The red bloom of the *murukku* trees fell in clusters from the hanging branches into crimson heaps that resembled fire. In the fertile lands on the banks of pools whose water irrigates the paddy fields, cranes and storks and other water birds frisked in freedom; and the ruddy bloom of the lotus plant, that looked like fire and the lily left unplucked by the girls that decked their wrists with lotus stalk lent colour to the rolling countryside of the foemen's productive, prosperous land.

But excessive confidence in his own might and a poor reading of your army's valour proved the undoing of the enemy king. His army was worsted in a fierce battle and the enemy in panic fled the field, even at the thrust of your infantry! Not a patch of arable land remained. The land was overgrown with weeds and ceased to produce: thorny bush now grows where once the highway ran. The wild cattle graze in pairs where once there stood the gabled mansions. We saw on our way these barren lands where the triumph of your armed might finds an awesome monument!

24

FAMED leader of mighty forces! Your valiant men athirst for battles, who brandish their swords with their proud right hand — swords that stink with rotting flesh withdrawn from their tiger-skin covers — swords that gleam like streaks of lightning which swiftly flash through heaven's expanse. These valiant men march in the wake of the infantry that destroyed the walls of the foemen's fortress well defended and throw the enemy's arrayed forces into dismal disarray: proud victory is yours won by your armed might!

The lord of the Queen who is decked wih jewels! Sweet in speech and justly famed all over the country and sung by poets! You are held in esteem by all the world as you worship the pious brahmins whose one desire is to reap the fruit of what by the scripture is rated high — brahmins who discharge their six-fold duty of hearing the scriptures and teaching them, of themselves performing the sacri-

ficial rites and guiding others in their due observance and the giving of gifts and of receiving them — the six-fold duty that is enjoined on them.

Your army camp is equipped, O King! with all the gear of a fighting force: it truly represents all that is best. In planning, in the provision of fighting gear, in the matter of the protection of the person of the king in organisation and in everything. There is an air of bustle in the camp, of keenness, even a passion, to fight. Your fighters hate to put away their arrows even at the end of the day: your men do not like to unstring their bows; they hate the respite, they love to fight!

Your greatness mocks at the diligent mind that plans to size up its height and range, it is vaster far than the five elements. We have observed with pleasure, O Kuttuva! the great pelf of your land that is still growing! The lustrous Venus a little inclined to the northern part of the sky it lights up blesses your land with timely rains by taking up its rightful position in the company of its sister planets.

But if the black rain-bearing clouds which descend down at the horizon and having showered the rains that nourish ascend the heavens in clock-wise movement with a fresh load of cooling water wafted by the easterlies for some reason fail the land, your people do not thereby suffer; feeding houses come into being: in huge pots resembling the *sĕmbu* stem whose wide leaves form the vessels mouth. Rice and meat are cooked together in great heaps the long day through; the feeding houses are littered with vessels and pestles with their rings worn out and wooden boards stained with blood where meat is cut with knives of steel. These and the jostling crowds of men who throng these feeding houses, starved and the rows of men who are seen eating in endless sessions all the long day through and the heaps of cooked food and the motto that none that starves will ever be denied — these amazing sights can disconcert the lookers-on; your prosperity is limitless even in adverse times! The pelf that defies capricious nature, may that pelf endure for ever!

25

WHEN you come down in battle strength on the land of a challenging enemy king, your gigantic drums reverberate like thunder from the firamament. The flags that fly on the chariots are white like the streams on the mountain slopes and the horses cruise at such a speed that they resemble gliding birds.

The army marches over the land: the thrust of the horses galloping so ruined the surface of the fertile fields they could not be brought under the plough again. The lands on which the elephants walked about exuding rut, awe-inspiring, were left unploughed and remorseless jungle claimed them all! The village square where your soldiers fought is later ploughed with a yoke of asses — a practice sanctioned by the martial code — but a meeting place it has ceased to be! The frightened people have fled the towns which now are guarded by no sentry guards the outer walls. The wooded tracts of the vanquished land dry up like tinder and forest fires flare up fed by violent winds and burn up all the vegetation: the jungle paths where wild fowls roam become the favoured habitat of ruthless bands of highway robbers: the users of these jungle paths are shied away by the lurking dangers: the vast productive enemy lands have turned a barren desolate waste!

26

EVEN in the manner of the minions of Death who themselves need fear no tormentors, your men rage over enemy lands unchecked in their depredations. The ruin wrought recalls to the mind the sack by Muruga of the rich old cities which happened to incur His terrible wrath. The paddy fields in former days were ploughed by the passage of chariots and the drier fields were ploughed deep by herds of pigs that dug for tubers. The notes of music from instruments could not prevail against the noise of curds being churned in cowherd homes. But all this is dead: the land is doomed and in the wake of cruel man nature takes a terrible toll: the rains have failed and a severe drought has snuffed out the last breath of life. All is desert with prickly bush. The once happy homes of busy men are fenced around by wiry creepers. Where the ground retains some moisture a massive jungle blocks the path. The sorrows of the

vanquished people have purged them of their strength of will: they spend their bleak and doleful days lamenting over the evil times with tear-filled eyes and helpless gestures that symbolise their desperate plight. This barren ruin makes me sad; I look back in a mood of wistful longing on the smiling fields and happy men of the now almost-forgotten past.

27

IN the lands that lie beyond your borders the young girls wearing lustrous bangles wreathed leaf garments with the *kuvalai* flowers that bloomed unbroken in continuous rows and here and there an *āmbal* bloom to relieve the drabness of the leaves. Draped in these they walked to the fields that lie beside the spreading lake — where gay musicians given to drink decked with flowers made of gold arranged over their curly hair filled the air with sweet melodies; the girls climbed up the *maruthам* trees and sang to scare the flocks of birds away from the fields of ripening grain: but inspired by the music of the singing girls the peacocks danced in ecstasy filling the air with their raucous cries.

The water in the lake was kept in check by the sluice gates which took its pressure: in the channels through which the water flowed the *neidal* blossomed everywhere: the buzzing bees invaded the flowers for the sweet nectar that flowed from them and then scattered over the paddy fields. A heavy cart was hauled by bulls over the muddy paddy field: in a sudden movement its wheel got stuck in the churned-up mire underneath; the powerful animals pulled with a will and the men lent a hand and pushed it out and the noise of the effort filled the air. Besides the noises of such peaceful scenes, the land was a stranger to the din of war: the land was productive and the people gay.

All this was true of the land of your foe till his misdemeanour strayed beyond the limits imposed by rectitude. Your eyes were turned on the hapless land — eyes that were bloodshot from fury roused; and all was ruined — the land turned desert!

28

PROSPERITY rules over all your land! Your fleet-footed men in a valiant stand routed the powerful enemy king with a well-trained corps of bright-eyed elephants and with feet besmeared with the foemen's blood they laid aside their quick-fire bows and resumed their work in the paddy fields. Reunited with their wives these efficient farmers tend the fields with right good will and make them bloom. Peace and plenty rule the land where you play your protector's role! One onslaught your land however is called upon to suffer, O King! Even when the surrounding hills appear barren with streams dried up, the river *Pēriyāru* of your land swells up and still the waters come: they flow over the banks and over the fields, even over the grazing lands, where the ground that is dry with the drought is broken up by deep fissures. Water fills them: the frothing current with the leaves of the trees it has rooted up and the thunderous roar of the gushing water seems like an army of fighting men adorned with leaves with their spirit aroused who plunge with a will into the field of battle.

29

FATIGUED after the spell of pounding grain youthful maidens with bangled wrists rest their pestles against the plantain trees and beguile the day by gathering flowers. The storks in the fields of the ripe paddy whose stalks are bent with the weight of the grain scatter in panic at the coming of the girls. The cranes having fed on the *ayirai* fish foregather in the shades of the spreading trees. The smaller birds with a white plumage are playfully chased by very young girls who sport no bangles on their wrists. In such a land of fun-loving people, fairs and festivals are held in plenty. Hordes of songsters starved of food gather, strumming faultless lutes in the village square and in front of houses.

Such was the state of the enemy's land full of large, teeming cities before the onslaught of Kuttuvan. But his dauntless fighting men after worship of the main war drum with the various grains heaped kind by kind and the blood of the animal sacrificed (the drum was covered with a hairy skin in such a way the hairy side was placed in contact with the drum) played on the drum in sweeping strokes

at the treated patch of a dusky hue; they struck mute terror in the hearts of the foes even from a distance, before the march; and when the Chērā's men did charge the foemen scattered and the fortress fell. The land of the vanquished enemy king quickly lost its wonted bloom and, a thousand pities! it turned desert!

30

WHERE on the shore stand *gnazhal* trees whose scattered flowers are picked by girls, the cool backwater that looks like a vessel made of diamonds of a dazzling blue with its surface covered by the *neidal* plants whose green leaves are nature's backdrop to set off the glossy black of the flowers, offers an eager hunting ground for flocks of cranes which, when replete take refuge in the *punnai* branch. To such enchanting sandy shore the waves that shake the hanging creepers bring conchs and coral and dazzling pearls in profusion for men to gather: and having gathered this marine bounty the men relax in the sandy mounds high on the shore under shady trees: for such was the pelf of the coastal towns! In the wild country where hillocks sprout close together, there are smaller towns where gold is sold in the long bazaar, where huntsmen with their hair adorned with wreaths of the bloom of the *kānthal* plant carrying their killer bows bring the prized flesh of horned game and the bright white tusk of giant elephants and in fair barter exchange them for brimming mugs of limpid liquor. The well-watered plains were prosperous too: the seething red waters of the swollen river topped by white crests of foamy froth, with the force of the current fell the *marutham* tree from whose rich blossom nectar flows. And still they swell, the angry floods, and the banks give away with their mud embankments which have been reinforced by rolls of hay. Desperately the working men fight a tiresome battle all the day with the gushing seething angry waters and when at last they quell the floods the watching crowds celebrate and all is fun and merriment. These crowds journey then to the towns — towns of hoary antiquity which hold a festival with beat of drums: and return at the close of the festivities in noisy groups to their native towns. The sugar-cane crop all round the year along with the flowers is harvested — the flowers of every hue that bloom in the shade cast by the stately cane. Thus all is fun and gaiety. All is festive in the towns and in the villages of the plains. On mountain slopes the huntsman homes thatched with

the hay of mountain grain are scented with the jasmine and with love: the guests are served the tasty flour of the soft-grained millet that grows on the hill and life is happy for the men that live, hard by the pastures, in the mountain slopes.

And the jungle dense with lofty trees where flowers fall and wither away, in some places has metamorphosed by nature's whims into mounds of sand fine and lac-like, of a ruddy hue: these mounds attract a bevy of girls who roam the place with sandalled feet.

The kings of these lands who by usage possessed war drums, a symbol of might and the many princelings who were their vassals united in their purpose to overthrow king Kuttuvan, did offer battle. Even though these allied armies had battlements and fortresses in the shore of the sea and the heart of the woods they were struck with fear as the Chērā's drums reverberated to the vaulting heavens. The challenge which the allies threw provoked the rage of the Chērā's men who began the worship of the main war-drum in the manner laid down by tradition. The priest of lofty mental bent trained in the conduct of martial rites loudly chanting the liturgy did offer valued sacrifice laced with liquor and with blood; this offering, the large-eyed female goblin, though greedy, did not dare to touch and all frustrated wrung her hands. Nor did the diligent ants nibble at the holy offering: behold a miracle! the sacrifice was gobbled up — an augury of martial triumph! — by the black-eyed ravens and the vultures. The worship over, your fighting men, dauntless ever in the field of battle met the foe in a bloody skirmish and routed them decisively: O King of fiery rage, your men, wearing embossed heroes' tinklers whose code is never to flee the field are gluttonous for more of war: they never tire of martial feats! They gather at the triumphant end and sing aloud with their powerful voices in a joyful bout of celebration. And hark! the drums are played again, this time announcing, not a battle but a mighty feast which the grateful king is throwing for his valiant men!

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] voice [illegible] of [illegible] And [illegible] the [illegible]
[illegible] which the pitiful candle is shining for his vanished image.

[illegible] to [illegible] of the
[illegible] crops
[illegible] the flowers
[illegible] by the stately [illegible] Thus
[illegible] in the towns and in the villages of
the plains, [illegible] slopes the [illegible] homes thatched with

FOURTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

TO Chēralāda of such wealth as induces unsurfeited enjoyment and to the daughter of Paduman the lord of Vēlāvi was born a son, to the accompaniment of tremor in the minds of those engaged in warfare. He grew up to manhood gathering fame: and marching on *Pūzhi* of traditional fame and splendour he annexed it to his kingdom. He gave battle to Nannan of *Kadambin Peruvāyil*, (the great gateway with the *kadambu* tree which produces big flowers resembling cartwheels) and put an end to his incessant belligerancy and cut the trunk of his protected tree, the *vāhai* with its golden flowers. He waged many triumphant battles where the carcasses of enemy elephants were carried away by the stream of blood and performed sacrifices in the fields of battle. He succoured the afflicted that had once been affluent and restored them to their wonted status. The name of this king whose victories breed more victories is Kalangāikkaṅṅi Nārmudicchēral.

Kāppiyātrukkāppiyanār composed these ten poems in his praise and was presented with forty lakhs of gold coins in a lump sum and in addition with a share of the royal powers of governance of the State. Kalangāikkaṅṅi Nārmudicchēral ruled for twenty-five years.

31

FROM the far-flung world of many hills, that is draped by the roaring billowy sea, come the noisy throngs of devotees whose supplications loud and long reverberate to the firmament. The devotees with hands upraised in pious fervour throng the temple where the clear-toned bell struck by the keepers gives out notes that are loud and long. The austere men abjuring food proceed to the ghat for their ritual bath in the cool water: they then gather in the temple of Thirumāl to drink with their eyes the beauty of the Lord

enshrined within whose chest that holds His consort sports the garland wreathed with *tulasi* bunches with the sweet perfume that draws the bees, whose one hand holds the lustrous disc whose brilliance blinds the gazing eye. Having worshipped at Thirumāl's feet, they return home with aims fulfilled, their hearts filled with beautitude.

Peaceful pursuits such as these, such pilgrimages, such fulfilment you guarantee to those who live in the lands under your protective care. Like the full moon whose radiance dispels the murky emerald gloom, you promote good living and good conduct amongst your subjects: you quell your foes and capture as the trophy their principal drum. Your manhood thus by might proclaimed and the kingly duties thus fulfilled you stand athwart with your jewelled chest even like the *Viñdu* range from north to south, impregnable, whose towering summit of lasting snows stops the rain clouds in their path that they may yield the monsoon showers which sustain life in the earth below!

Your drum-like shoulders of powerful build are even like the log (if lifted up) which the demons use to buttress up the door of the walls of their aerial fort! These shoulders have earned you lasting fame in the world draped by the murky sea swept by the waves with their silvery crests. You give freely of your limitless pelf, you remind me of the famed Vandan. Your Queen with her luxuriant locks which draw to themselves swarms of bees has a lustrous forehead lighting up the pair of pendants on her ears. Her respledent body lends glamour to all her jewels made of gold. She of the handsome round navel who resides in the hoary royal home, the finest votary of the moral law is even like the red star *Arundhati*, the fore-most among the women of the world of Gods.

Your mighty war drum does not sound to instil fear in noncombatants: it reverberates in the field of battle and only to signal martial triumph. In the field that is thick with javelins your leading warriors with wreaths of the blooms of the palmyra tree, set close together, with gold circlets in their powerful feet fight valiantly with their foes who would not submit to your superior might, and crush them so they lose their spirit and flee the field: your men disdain aiming their weapons at their fleeing backs. They act as the shield to those they like but like an angry God

they decimate the ranks of men that rise against them. You excel in every field, in the manner shown, O valiant King, great in war and great in peace!

32

ONE aspect of your nature, O King, impels me into wonderment. Your many qualities like valour, courage, surpassing love and modesty, your firm adherence to veracity and a repudiation of extreme stances have spread your fame in the four directions! The issue of the battles which you fight is never for a moment in doubt, O King! Your army eager for the thrill of battle marches ahead with the young elephants whose ivory tusks grow dazzling pearls, which trumpet loudly in their excitement all over the enemy's lands. The foemen extend the might of your men but fighting at their best your men wrest a resounding victory. The spoils of war which your armies seize are so profuse, you give away a major part: your minstrels get so much they are truly overwhelmed, but what is left after such generous gifts is ample for your own delectation.

You uplift such among your subjects as once having tasted affluence have now come down in the social scale. Your measures, O King, for the common good have engendered wonder in my mind! O nonpareil among warriors, you possess such traits of character in such measures as defy assessment. But I am struck with wonder at one of them. Nedumidal Anji, the chief of your foes challenged your might in the field of war. Fight as he could he could not stem the thrust of your mountainous elephants. Anji fell and his fertile land was overrun by your triumphant forces. The fields were ruined: you annexed the land where the paddy bent with the weight of the grain looked like a luxuriant bamboo grove where the longlegged cranes fished for food—the land where the crops never failed. Despite the power of your mighty arms there were detractors whose abuse did never abate: but such worthless men, the meanest rats of your foemen's land, whose conduct called for chastisement you pardoned with your forbearance! I am struck with wonder at such a thing, this rare forbearance, your unique gift!

33

O KING! that leads a chariot force all characterised by flying flags! My surprise at your forbearance is as nothing before my present wonder at the panic and terror of the enemy kings when they see the forces led by you! When you overrun an alien land you tie to the foeman's protected tree your elephants wearing tinkling bells, whose feet are huge, resembling drums: your army in its onward march raises dust with its violent thrust and its many manouvres like encircling the enemy forces: the limpid water of the bathing ghats gets muddy with these manouvres and the fields where your army camps for a while are ruined, they will not yield again.

This splendid triumph of your gallant forces was achieved through valour: it did not owe to elaborate martial equipment. The swords served the purpose of spired ramparts, the javelins, of defensive woods, the speeded arrows, of thorn barricades: and the weapons with blood at the business end that were mounted round your infantry performed the functions of a protective moat. Your infantry was the real armour and the sounding drums were as peals of thunder and when your army equipped thus marches onward, the foemen wilt and in panic flee the field of battle. The picture of the enemy disarray even at the sight of your armed forces occasions the greatest wonderment, greater even than what was caused by a contemplation of your forbearance.

34

THE foes who question your paramountcy whose garments of fine thread reach to the ground, whose feet are decked with embossed tinklers, who always observe the vow of heroes never to flee the field of battle give you a wide berth in terror of you: such, O King, is your matchless prowess!

Peerless warrior, who, when fighting foes who mind the rules of warfare utterly destroys their martial might and raises a tumult of exultation among his men in the thick of the battle where drums are beaten and fighters crowd! The noblest feature of your leadership is the way you safeguard the lives of your men

and extend a hand of protection all by yourself and not through others — you rush to their rescue when sorely pressed, riding the horse with the ruddy mane or the chariot with the streaming banner or seated on the neck of the elephant decked with the garland of golden blooms, that appears spotted over its wide forehead owing to the cloth that drapes the part, and strikes terror in the onlookers' hearts — nay, you rush at the foe to protect your men unmounted even, if the need arises! It is this personal solicitude that marks you off from all the others and makes you a matchless warrior-king, dreaded by all powerful foes!

35

THE way you care for your fighting men and tend them in person and protect them ensures your victory whomever you fight ar d earns for you everlasting fame among the good, O matchless King!

The results of such personal care are disastrous for the enemy's side. The battlefield is strewn about with the shiny tusks of elephant bulls and the broken wheels of chariots: pairs of vultures hover round and gorge themselves on the flesh of corpses: and headless trunks get up and dance in the fateful field where you fought and won. The field is red with the blood of your foes — red like the heavens when the sun is setting — and goblins dance their weird dances. But it is such triumphs that earn for you boundless wealth and lasting fame and the mantle of greatness, O mighty King!

36

THE might of your arms lasts for ever, never yielding, never declining — the might from which flows all this pelf that keeps booming all the time. Filled with fervour and a hero's zeal you go to battle with your men of proven skill in the arts of war and crush your foemen who adopt new and cunning modes of warfare. The foes are routed: the field is filled with the severed trunks of elephants resembling in shape and size and hue great logs, cut down, of the palmyra. The battle was fought out hand to hand, the swords of both the contenders flashing bright in the thick of the battle.

Grievous were the losses: corpses, alternating with the carcasses of horse and elephant killed in the fray were sought by the vulture with his mate with spotted neck and uneven back, and by the eagle with the crested head. But the blood that flows from severed bodies bears them down — the predators and the load of bodies they feed on — cascading down the depressions with the terrible goblins gobbling up big chunks of flesh executing macabre dances all the time. You engage yourself in ceaseless wars, undefeated: may your pelf, always booming, last forever!

37

O FAULTLESS King you have, at once the might with which to crush your foes and the generous heart to distribute liberal jewels to the artistes. You possess the range of virtues, and you have controlled your mind and the senses and men of truth all laud your fame! You succour the distressed among your subjects with the wealth from your ceaseless victories. You sally forth with feet adorned, a big wreath of black palmyra flowers dangling on your hero's chest and break into the defences of the enemy kings which are destroyed: the foes, routed and taken prisoner, follow their captor. But far from doing harm to the captives you convert them from their violent ways to a life of peace, that they get to be rather like those that live in the shade of your famous, hoary umbrella! You never swerve from the path of such kindly treatment even to the foe; you possess at once the moral fibre to effect such a change of heart, O King, and dauntless valour in the field of battle! For the lasting good of the people of the world I pray that your pelf know no surcease, and that you lead for countless aeons such a useful, abundant and happily life!

38

YOU are wedded to the people's cause, to the betterment of your people's lot; and you developed all the resources which were many, varied and limitless and made all the land productive. Your country blooms, O Chērā King, who wear a head wreath of *kalangāi*, whose hair is tied up with plantain fibre! In personal command of the elephant corps you lead the assault on the enemy fort which crumbles at the fierce impact. The land is annexed for

you, O King, by the elephants with jewelled tusks, the horses with their ruddy manes and the foot-soldiers with jewelled feet who wear head wreaths finely fashioned.

O Chērā, titled Vānavarambā, you are the refuge, you succour all that come to you in supplication: your court is thronged by gifted bards. O Lord of the Queen with a lustrous forehead! intrepid lion of the field of battle! there is no stigma on your name: all your boundless wealth was acquired by blameless means, O warrior King, whose faultless undaunted hero's chest is marked by none but battle scars!

When you come by the good things of life you do not ask that these be offered one by one for your sole enjoyment. You resist temptation with your strength of will and share the good things, the choicest pleasures with those around you: you live for others! There is no dearth of wealthy men in the world: but withal, O King, you shall be praised as the best men and the matchless fame that you have earned shall outlive that of all of them.

39

IN the fiery *Tumbai* form of battle the foes whose ire has been roused to fight quake with fear in the battle front and cry out in their panic at the thunderous roar of your huge war drums that are struck with sticks to urge the army in its onward march: your men inspired by a passion to fight rout the foes and ruin their forts. Such is your might and your terrible wrath, O master of the craft of the battlefield, peerless in all the forms of war, who decimate men like the God of Death!

In the woods, on the *vēl* tree bereft of leaves with dried up branches barren, bare, the drove of pigeons with their dotted necks and uneven backs cries out in panic at the sight of the net-like spider-web formed out of delicate hair-like strands not spun in the manner of other threads from out of the wool of the cotton plant. O King, you wear a web of pearls that is rather like a spider's woven web, set off with jewels on gold leaf cover on the fringe of which is a lace of gems, the whole outfit covering your hair that has been dressed with plantain fibre!

O King! you are surrounded by war-hungry men who love to fight under your banner's shade and chant your name and your heroic deeds: but such is your own selfless bent and your vow to live for universal good, these men too, in emulation, love to give unto suppliants and after your manner without stint!

40

'O KING! while your war drums make sweet music, beaten with powerful sticks, your soldiers fight with injured shoulders, where the battle ranges thick and fierce: the second-line forces have camped in the fields where the *karandai's* dusky creeper spreads. Your reserve forces led by your kinsmen who thirst for the thrill and glory of war may therefore be held back: they should not fight. We ask this of you in supplication as we have nowhere to go and none to save us', thus pray the warriors of the defeated land whose kings had provoked his vengeful anger and have fled the country, worsted in battle—warriors who crouch in dejected silence in the ramparts of the forts which are still standing. His deceitful foes all wearing wreaths of the white palm flowers, a Chērā sign, offered battle of the *Tumbai* type: these doughty warriors skilled in battle, tough to quell were crushed by him and those who survived fled the field. The innocent subjects left behind, he took over and succoured them and settled them happily in his own kingdom. He celebrated his great victory in the field itself before his chariots, the Chēralādā of munificent hands and the chest where Thiru loves to dwell,—the hero's chest adorned by the gold from the head of seven worsted kings. And in the battle he fought with Nannan who decked his hair with a golden wreath and moved about in a golden chariot, his forces fought with such fierce valour with the Chērā at their head, that the foe was routed and his protected *vāhai* tree cut down, with its lovely blossom, root and branch!

O Chērā monarch with the hair done up with plantain fibre, mighty warrior! The suppliants who throng your place are offered cups of limpid liquor distilled with herbs—a beverage that stimulates a sense of pleasure without producing inebriation: the king quaffs an even milder drink making merry with the destitutes who are loath to leave the company of their hospitable royal

friend, who thus spends a happy time ignoring the dismal augury of the *unnam* tree with uneven trunk that droops portending royal doom, in the *Nēri* mountain marked by steams that cascade down in cataracts resounding through the mountain caverns.

Female minstrel wearing bangles few in number! Repair at once to the court of the generous Chērā king! Female bards of a refined nature have received jewels in such large numbers from Nārmudicchēral that they appear when decked with them, like *vēngai* trees full with blossom, shining bright, while the bards display the golden flowers which the king has presented them. Their assistants whom the generous king had plied with liquor still could sing of the martial glories of their kingly patron in a distinct fashion, despite the drink and even though they are immature their songs composed with simple words were well-received: the simple heart of the budding poets runneth over — if you go to this Chērā king, he shall give you elephants which being powerful could run amok urged by a wrath that burns like a fire — a forest fire whose crimson light could well be seen from the distant cities, but yet obey the prodding *ankus*, well trained animals looking terrible as they raise with their thumping feet dust in columns dense like elephants eager to carry out all that is cast as duty on them. The Chērā shall give you elephants many in number as presents for you, if, fair musician, you repair at once to his hospitable court!

FIFTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

NEDUNCHĒRALĀDAN, the lord of the western people of whom the northerners go in fear, whose triumphant flag always flies aloft, married Manakkiḷḷi the Chōlā princess from whom he begot a son. (The son grew up to manhood.) He desired to get a stone to make an icon of Kaṅṅaki, the Goddess of chastity and travelled like an arrow through dense jungles defeating two Aryan kings, Kanaka and Vijaya. He washed the stone in the water of the famed Ganga. He captured many cows of selected pedigree with their calves and camped for a while in Idumbu, the great forest where (the natives), equipped with powerful bows and arrows were of such courage that they never fled in fear the field of battle. (After victory in a battle) where warriors resembling valiant tigers were felled, he destroyed Viyalūr which was distinguished by its *neidal* creepers with their small bunches of blooms and crossing over to the other bank, he destroyed Kodukūr. He cut the broad drum-like trunk of the neem tree with its black branches, the protected tree of Pazhayan. (On the death of Pazhayan), his wives with their delicate natural perfume removed their ornaments and shaved off their many plaits of dressed hair which were twisted into ropes with which his elephants were yoked to carts (and the Chērā king loaded the cut-down protected tree in these carts and took it to his capital city). He stayed in a place called Nērivāyil and destroyed the might of the Chōlā army under the leadership of nine scions of the Chōlā royal line and put an end to their incessant belligerancy. With the aid of his blemishless army he made the sea beat a retreat. On this king Senguttuvan, Paranar of unblemished poems of high thought-content sang ten songs.

The king gave the revenues of the *umbar* woods as well as his son Kuttuvan Chēral as his largess to the poet Paranar.

Senguttuvan who made the sea retreat ruled for fifty-five years.

41

IN the course of our trek across barren tracts where bamboos have dried up with the heat and the drought, our juniors carrying ringed lutes equipped with strings twisted and tensed to give out sweet strains from the spacious box, and gigantic drums to keep time with and smaller drums with a single patch, the pipe that is made from bamboo stem with a ring left on, and the instruments all gathered together and kept in a bag that is tied at the end of a weighted stick and carried with care on a shoulder — the youths trained in music send up their prayers for our safe passage through the friendless wastes. The shadeless tracks we travelled on were many in number, harsh, fatiguing, but we did encounter wooded tracts where the elephant flies into an awesome rage when the beast describes the *vēngai* trees that grow dense on the mountain slopes and are covered with their lustrous yellow blooms, taking them for tigers with yellow stripes, and bending a branch with its load of flowers the powerful beast breaks it clean and holds it aloft with a fearful grace above its black and monstrous head and trumpets aloud in the echoing woods like warriors arrayed in the field of battle holding aloft a stick in their hands and roaring defiance at the foe.

We have crossed such tracts and come to you, O faultless King with powerful chariots! You have engaged your armies in endless wars. Your warriors keep their terrible oaths, they do not mind the sacrifice: they fight undaunted in the tumultuous field where the monstrous drums of war resound. The fight is fierce and the foemen kings are utterly destroyed, their outsize heads are pounded with the sticks your fighters wield, even like pepper ground by pestles. The field is like the billowy sea tumultuous with the unceasing din of the big-eyed drums beaten with sticks to urge your fighters to cleave their way onward into the thick of the battle and win a a glorious victory; you thus acquire lasting fame, disseminated by your drum. You ride a fleet horse with a silvery crest: you seek out your foe in the icy sea and crush him in a fierce battle that sets up such an awesome wind that the foamy waves get dissipated. Your feet have traversed a myriad fields in these your many martial sallies: will your feet know respite, ever? Will your martial labours ever cease?

42

DECKED with black palmyra flowers wreathed into garlands and worn on the chest, and huge gold anklets on their feet your fighters deign to offer battle wearing the symbolic *tumbai* blooms only with those that bear long scars on chests serrated by battle scars made longer by the surgeon's needle long and white like the *siral's* beak poised while leaving the icy pond after a lightning dip in search of fish, the long white needle that digging deep in the red wound shows up sharp and white in a sudden flick of the surgeon's fingers. They love to fight the special battle symbolised by the *tumbai* bloom only with the heroes with arrow-scars: the others they fight without wearing the blooms — they are such sticklers for the heroes' code. And you are their natural leader and lord and the beloved of the Queen with the lustrous forehead! You own huge elephants with which you wage endless wars, O mighty Kuttuva! The wars you wage do never swerve from the heroes' code: yet every time you go to war, you crush the might of the foemen kings ranged against you, you celebrate your martial triumph by freely giving pots of liquor to the battle's heroes and to the bards. The liquor pots with sandal paste and wreaths of ginger and fragrant flowers kept in frames that allow them play when they move, are filled to the brim with tasty liquor blue as a gem and are offered by you without a thought of keeping back some for your own use! The liquor promotes exquisite pleasure among the quaffers in the camp.

To the numerous kinsmen of the artistes you make presents of fleet horses with graceful crests that oscillate. How many of them were given away? To the wonder of the people you crushed the kings by sallying forth over the dusky sea and on your return you were feted by your kinsmen riding chariots crowding the ground all over the land and by the kings and the proud heroes who ride elephants with big shining tusks. The horses which you gave away were numberless like the icy waves that travel over the vast expanse of the waters of the sea, clear and glossy, incessantly with no respite — waves which carry white foamy crests that dissipate with the force of the fall into droplets radiant with rainbow colours!

43

O KUTTUVA of the golden wreath! leader of armies that all the times are occupied in routing those that offer battle — armies that march to the lands of the kings that challenge your might by playing their drums, and they crush them all and exultant, raise a thunderous din, and having crushed them, they ruin the fields whose high yields had justly made the enemy kingdom well renowned. Thus were the lands annexed by you — the lands that lie between the Cape forming the southern boundary and in the north the Himalayas, the lofty mountains high with boulders where reside the saintly ones — mountains where the young maidens all wearing lustrous ornaments, whose glossy cloudlike tresses are dressed with the hair of the *kavari* deer, into buns, girls who love to sit in the swing, who give up in despair their counting game seeing the countless female elephants coming in herds with their loving males with their giant legs that look like mortars and lustrous tusks and monstrous trunks, elephants all in rut that enter the verdant woods where the maidens play.

You give of your pelf to the suppliants even like the clouds that thunder and flash countless lightnings with their load of water and send down the rain in heavy torrents to the land below in the grip of a drought of such fierce intensity, the bamboos dry up in the woods and the mountain slopes are grassless, bare, with the water courses running dry and the pitiless sun's rays beating down; the rains then feed the mighty river which breaks its banks high though they are — a surging river no boatman dares to ferry over — the floods roll on and inundate the rolling plains; the happy farmers decked with the bloom of the *konrai* that blossoms with the rains fit the plough for the season's ploughing. You give freely like the clouds; the poets who come to you receive ceaseless gifts of the richest viands which you share with your poor guests. The bards who deal out exquisite pleasure are showered with gifts of gold jewels. The female minstrels with a voice that merges with the timbre of the lyre that vanquishes the liquid notes of the *kinnara* bird with the flapping wings, get female elephants. Your fighters wearing wreaths of the bloom of *vāhai* with its protruding stamens and the *uzhingnai* from its dainty creeper — the men that love the thrill of battle and the inebriation of victory whose might strikes

terror in the enemy camp and who love to plunder the foemen's lands get rich presents of killer elephants. The minstrels holding thin bamboo sticks cut with the eyes left on, repair to the town square where they panegyrise their hero's many martial triumphs, from whence they go to the sides of the houses and sing the ballads of his triumphant battles — these bards are offered horses as gifts. But while engaged thus in rewarding those that come in supplication you love to wrest more victories: even your foes are filled with wonder and praise your valour and your cultured ways and your adherence to the moral law.

O generous King! I see your court where the drums keep time to the medium tune where the air is filled with the savoury smoke from the fat meat roasting in the grill. The suppliants are offered liquor that retains its warmth in the pots kept in the stands designed for them — neither too big nor inadequate —and though the pots are often filled they do not stand long full to the brim, such is the measure of your generous heart and the level of the pelf your land enjoys under your benign captaincy!

44

MIGHTY king with a swaggering gait! Your fighters marching with a violent thud that makes the ground tremble, with chariots whose triumphant flags on their lofty masts caress the skies when they wave about, wage big battles and win them all and annexe booty from the vanquished kings, precious, limitless and hard to garner. But do you hoard it as your own possession? You do not: you give it away to those in need of succour and you give without stint. For your nature is such you delight in giving, never dreaming of receiving from others, whatever the hardship you have to face: such is your selfless, untainted heart! You rush to war when the need arises. When your friend and ally Arugai, the winner of many a battle, who wore the blooms from the delicate *uzhingnai* creeper having claimed your friendship in the hearing of all offered battle to the Mōhūr king who roundly beat him and the vanquished king in fear, vanished from the scene. The ignominy of such a rout of a person who claimed to be your friend even if he was in a distant land, was too great for you to suffer in silence. You went to war and the battlements of Mōhūr were smashed to smithereens as if encompass-

ed by an act of God. You captured his protected drum of war, you forced him to break his vengeful vow and to bow down to you in meek submission. You captured his protected tree, the neem, cut it down to manageable bits of such a size as to make a drum and loaded them all in a cart to which you yoked the Mōhūr elephants and brought them home, in a triumphant journey! O mighty King, your healthy body the seat of all your matchless might that is praised by the brave shall only be seen by the fair minstrel that sings your praise. This body of yours shall never know death! In the burial grounds where the crested owl forgets the place where it kept the piece of lean meat and is nagged by its angry mate, where kings of yore who had crushed their foes, of the proper royal lineage who kept their protected drums of war who led happy lives, ruling over the wide earth girt by the billowy seas and passed away were laid to rest, where under *vanni* trees the mourners gather your powerful body shall not be laid in the earthen urn to rest forever!

45

O KING Kuttuva, mighty in battle with your hero's chest bedecked with gold from the crest of seven defeated kings! Your noble warriors when they enter the field wear a golden *tumbai*, war's insignia and a quiver worked with floral designs and arrows that sleep like snakes in their pit and take with them a bow that is bent and a heroic heart that never bends and dented javelins with the tips bent back with the killing of elephants in the battlefield where they fight the foe by closing their ranks. On beating the enemy in the field, your fighters cross the many moats and enter by force the many walled fort: and the many things the foe had acquired, your men seize or destroy at will. O King with the broad hero's shoulders that are tough like the tree that reinforces the door of the walls of the capacious fort that is part of the system of the foe's defences, the shoulders that win the enemy's lands were raised in the terrible triumphal dances which you danced over heaps of corpses strewn in the battlefield of bygone days.

Then came the feast: your valorous men who never in fear flee the field of battle have a mighty good time eating quantities of rice and meat that have been cooked together so well one cannot tell the

rice from the meat, and they merge into a dish of surpassing flavour. Of the kings of the world who scorn to have thorn fences over their kingdom's borders but equip themselves with tough white shields to guard them against foemen's speeding arrows none that has been or is now with us is your equal, O Kuttuva! For you have waged war with your foes with javelins that shine like gems, in the cold waters of the billowy sea which in their plenty are gathered up by the winds that oppose the motion of the boats — the sea that knows no depletion even through the clouds that suck up its waters nor ever is known to overflow with all the water brought by the rivers.

46

FEMALE bards with glossy tresses covered with bees drawn to the flowers which they wear over the dressed hair done up prettily into a bun, who are decked with jewels and wreaths and leaves, with their forearms set off by many bangles of shining lustre in dense profusion, on whose handsome chest hang necklaces set with brilliant shining gems — these minstrels strum the big-stringed lyre and they sing ballads in the *Palaippaṅ* in praise of Kuttuvan's dauntless courage in fighting his foes the *Uzhingnai* way. The king, delighted, feeds them all and pleases them with largesses and with sweet words of approbation.

Kuttuvan's chariot wheel that is stained with blood in its passage through many battlefields and through many a wooded tract in its further progress crushes down without design, the foemen's heads: he leads a corps of elephants that has notched a myriad triumphs. Kuttuvan of great martial fame further, sailing over the seas where the ceaseless waves disintegrate, engaged his foes in a maritime war; they fought fiercely with their javelins, stirring up the waters of the restless sea where the conchs filled the air with sweet music. But the foes could not withstand his might and fled, worsted at his valorous hands. The minstrels who go to balladize his praise and receive his generous gifts do not wish to leave his court — they desire his company for evermore!

47

KING Kuttuvan, despite his triumphs continues to occupy himself and his valiant men in restless warfare; he seeks out his foes

and destroys them in decisive battles. The minstrels keep on singing ballads praising the king's many deeds of valour: and without restraint, in a ceaseless stream he plies them with gifts of elephants. In the streets of the country's teeming towns where tied to the tops of the palatial houses are white flags looking like foamy streams cascading over a mountain slope, tall lamps light up the open space where handsome girls with lustrous foreheads execute their graceful dances — tall lamps furnished with a generous wick which burning gives off a brilliant light fed by liberal stocks of ghee poured to the brim and overflowing at the jutting nose of the lamp where the wick sucks up the fuel as it burns, the crowds that throng such dancing sessions in the hoary palaces of your teeming towns chant the praise of their valorous king, in an endless paean all the time.

48

ROYAL Sailor! Lord of harbours cool with the foam of the waves of the sea where sailing in your many boats you met the foes in a fiery battle. Deathless fame has been yours; you gave lotuses wrought in gold to the songsters: and to the female bards with lustrous foreheads you gave away wreaths of golden blooms! The foemen you worsted in the maritime war had brought loads of valued things along the sea route: you seized them all. But this booty seized in battle fiercely fought and nobly won you did not want to keep: your code is such you keep back nought for self. You distribute the booty of war cheerfully to all those bards that try to cabin your endless fame within the frame of their panegyrics. This imprudent munificence is praised by the skilful junior bards who stretch their hands of equal size all in a row to receive their share. O King with auspicious marks on your chest! you are soft and yielding when dealing with the artistes that throng your court; but you display in the field of battle that valour and courage that yield to none. The ranging fires your fighters start in the lands of the worsted enemy king blacken the flowers in the wreaths you wear and dry up the sandal paste on your chest.

When the *Kānchi* river that has its source in a mountain that stands within your kingdom and flows into the sea that is under your rule swells up with sweet swishing waters, your subjects hearken to the call of the river and indulge in pleasant water sports: seeking shade

in blooming bowers they celebrate the summer's coming. This carefree, joyful, beauteous life you and your kinsmen lead together: such of your subjects as love these pleasures also join the happy group: the scene of all the festivities is the sandy bank of the *Kānchi* river; may your fame reside in the world, for as many years, O mighty King, as there are sands in the banks of the river!

49

SISTER minstrels with tossing tresses, timid of nature, come with us, with all your kin that live by singing, that all of us may get as presents, clothes and jewels and royal food; let us throng the court of Kuttuvan! His bitter foe, the king of Mōhūr had allied himself with the Chōlā king and the armies of several smaller kings and chieftains rallied to their common cause. The elephant corps of the allied armies marched sedately spreading out: the swift horses of their cavalry, spurred on by the riders on their backs pressed ahead with the rest of the army: the chariots with their banners flying impressive on their lofty masts rolled on their tortuous way ahead. The infantry wielding javelins engaged the flanks of the Chērā force and contained its valiant onward thrust. The chiefs of the allied armies rode united in their firm resolve and at the head of all of them rode the arrogant Mōhūr king confident of the strength he had mustered.

The battle raged bitter and fierce. The allies, beaten began to scatter: chaos reigned. The enemy fighters with their hands oozing blood having plucked their javelins free from out of the chests of Chērā warriors were wounded themselves, in their chests and the blood that flowed from the wounds gathered in the holes on the battle-ground like pools of water after the rains. Heaps of corpses built up high: grievous was the rout of the allied forces and great was the Chērā's victory! Accompanied by the din of the drums whose treated patch had a sonorous sound the triumphant forces of the Chērā land despoiled the wealth of the Mōhūr king and cut down the neem, his protected tree, strong and doughty with its dusky twigs and so ruined all his lands his subjects, unable to wrest a living, perished in numbers; the holocaust was grievous, wrought by the triumphant Chērā. Let us go and throng the Court of this fierce but generous Kuttuvan!

50

WHEN on the mountains with lofty peaks the monsoon clouds rain copious showers and peals of thunder reverberate striking terror in the hearts of beasts with the driving wind and flaying hailstorm, the *Cāuvery* river descends to the plains enriching the fields of the dense sugar-cane, nourishing the people of this fertile tract. O Senguttuva, you resemble the *Cāuvery* that flows due east with flood waters with their precious load of alluvium that feeds the lands! Nay, you are more: you are the confluence of the three rivers carrying blooms in their current! Proud kings there were who had the hills and the sea as impregnable forts to keep out the foe, kings who had won resounding triumphs with the aid of warriors whose build of body inspired awe in the onlookers' mind. You ordered your army to march; like a flood it flowed on with the murderous elephants coming like waves, with the bows like the foam and the tips of the javelins seen above the high shields, resembling the darting fish. Your army whose drums strike awe in the hearts of enemy kings who surrender to you stands up now as their protective armour. This fighting force which rolled as a flood routed the arrogant challengers whose fame flickered and was extinguished as was their burning fire of wrath.

But long have you tarried in your battle camp! Back at home, in times of peace, of nights, you would be locked in close embrace with the handsome ladies of your royal home on whom the skill of the dressing maids has operated to surpassing effect; the sandal paste on their heaving bosom and the mark on their forehead and their collyrium wear off in the course of the dalliance. You would prefer for a mattress their dishevelled hair—soft tresses that draw the buzzing bees; and urged by a greatly painful passion you garnered a harvest of sensuous pleasure out of the night in close embrace with these women: and slept exhausted in the dying moments of the night; when will such nights of pleasure be, when shall you be back at home? Here in the camp with the conchs blowing and all kinds of noise that banish sleep you are preoccupied with the problems of war and the boundless bounty that triumph begets and the fury you direct towards your hapless foes. Where is the chance for you to sleep even for a moment in your battle camp?

SIXTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

ĀDUKŌTPĀTTUCCHĒRALĀDAN was the child of Nedunchēralādan the lord of the Western country and the Queen, the daughter of Vēlāvikkōmān. He defeated the denizens of the Dandakāranya and recovered the mountain goats taken away by them and restored them to the people of Thondi. To the brahmins he gave red coloured cows and a town in the Western country. He was widely known as Vānavaramban and loved by all the people. He defeated many kings and decimated the ranks of the warlike *mazhavās*. He cared for his subjects like his own children. His heart was filled with love and he steadfastly adhered to the edicts of the moral law.

Nacchellaiyār the poetess who sang of the rook, who had composed many poems and whose conduct was noted for its ethical restraint, sang ten poems about this Ādukōtpāttucchēralādan.

The poetess got as presents nine measures of gold and a lakh of gold coins from the king who gave her a seat near himself.

Ādukōtpāttucchēralādan ruled for thirty-eight years.

51

CHĒRALĀDA! in the course of your journey to the natural bower on the shore of the sea whose restless surface of boundless waters is wrought upon by gusty winds which raise gigantic awesome waves which reverberate like peals of thunder, you stop for a while in the grove of palms expansive, clean and all done up making it fit for the royal guest. The grove is hard by *gnazhal* trees on whose branches laden with flowers in bunches drawing swarms of bees the long-legged cranes come and settle fatigued with fishing in the shallow puddles; betwixt the grove and the sea's expanse of cool waters is the sandy beach: the delicate lines traced by the crabs perambulating are obliterated by the fine sand strewn by the humid wind.

The king is seated in a *pandal* decked with wreaths of *neidal* fully blown, dark as eyes, and of *naravam* flowers dripping with honey and smelling sweet, with *punnai* blossom, tied to the roof: the kings and the great of the entire land are present in strength in that assembly — the land that is bounded in the east and the west by the two great seas and in the south by the cold ocean where blow the conchs: and in the north by the great mountain range, sacred and godly, full of snakes, sporting the rarest of resplendent gems, snakes that crawl all over the slopes in the graceful manner of the priestess possessed who moves about in slithering curves urged by spirits in the temple square. The songstresses with lustrous forehead and bashful glances and shining teeth and graceful gait and ruddy mouth from which come forth words of nectar begin to sing: and you, O King, who sport in your hand a silvery javelin tarry long immersed in music — so long that those who know you not reflect, 'How feckless is the king!'

But in truth you are awesome like the thunder-bolt which strikes terror with its resounding peal in the venomous serpents that live in the mountains where on the slopes the rain clouds roost, and destroy their fiery vengeful valour! The men that live and fight for you are so brave they seek the elephants of gigantic trunks: and wielding swords they shear their tusks bedecked with gold in a single stroke: what valour indeed and what courage is theirs, O Chēralāda! Their head-wreaths of the white palmyra bloom now red with the blood of foemen slain are marked by eagles as bits of flesh. Your junior bards wield helpless drums unable to coax any sound from them as their sides are torn and their dusky eyes pierced by the arrows aimed by the foe. Grievous is the slaughter: the enemy fighters who fall within your field of vision are slain: you are like the God of Death in the field of battle, for even like him none returns alive from your angry gaze that comprehends like a hunter's net all your foemen in its sweep: what a holy terror you are to them in the field of battle, O Chēralāda!

52

EVEN as the ships that sail the high seas spread out thundering in all directions, to bring home the priceless merchandise, the battle elephants in dense formations with their flags aloft all wander at

will; the stately chariots adorned with bells that have been cast for flawless timbre are deployed over other fields of battle. Your fighting men, brave and fierce raise aloft their dusky shields that look like rising clouds of rain and bearing swords and javelins they rush forth disdaining protective cover pressing forward that they fight the foe in the battle's front line, with their *thumbai* wreaths, symbol of valour unvanquished, shining amidst the foemen's ranks which get thinner with the progress of the fight and their soldiers ascend to the hero's heaven.

Thus you fight without a thought of cheating and victory is your constant lot. Your valiant hand, powerful, terrible even as a stroke of lightning in the sky unfolds only in the act of giving and never in the act of supplication, for so we hear it said by the wise.

Again, in the hall where the tall oil-lamp spreads effulgence of a godly kind and the drums are beaten and maidens dance the *thuṅangai*, you lend a hand — acting the while like a thundering bull — as the leading dancer for the girls to seize and lock in a chain of hands and bodies — men and women coming close together: your queen with a dangling wreath on her neck and patches of pallor spreading on her skin whose cool eyes have a cool pair of lids whose nature is lofty, is wroth at this and stands with her lips throbbing in anger even like a sprout when battered by the waves of water dashing on the banks; her leg ornaments filled with beads which she wears on her fine flower-like feet make a dainty sound in her passionate stance. Wishing to throw the small red flower, the *kuvaḷai*, at you, in manifest wrath, she turns down your humble prayer to her with folded hands in the manner of a beggar to hand over the flower of wrath to you! Angry still, she cries out in pain 'You love me not anymore, O King!' and would not part with the flower in her hand. Nor can you, with a quick look of rage seize the dainty bloom from the queen's hand.

But how are you able to grab the forts, whose walls rise up to the vaulting skies, of kings with their white royal umbrellas which resemble in their shape and their radiance the colourful sun in the wide blue sky whose burning rays create the day! May your head-wreath, symbol of might in the field of battle, bloom for ever!

53

WHEN you camp with your army in the foes' domain chosen for its wealth which you covet and hope to annex by the might of your arms, the enemy brings all the valued things to your august presence and offers them with humble words of submission: you accept the gifts from their productive lands and give them your priceless alliance. Then you depart with your equipage bound for your hoary capital town set in the midst of the wooded tracts in the heart of the highlands where hills abound. On the way your forces descry a fort; there, on the gate, is the gear that throws a shower of arrows at the foes, on which is fixed a figurine with embossed tinklers for its feet and a skirt of leaves as its drapery. The fort has a deep encircling moat where murderous crocodiles lash about and a curving wall that is built so high it reaches upto the firmament. This fort was seized after routing the foe by the might of arms in the days gone by and offered as gift to a friendly vassal, and protected by the kings of your unbroken line. Will it be meet, O wrathful King, for you to throw your forces at this? Your elephants with spotted fore-heads filled with rut-secretion on which swarms of bees pounce and feast, which sport the scars occasioned by their ramming the doors made of *vēngai* timber mistaking them to be tigers, heedless of the restraining rod, may see the doors of this friendly fort—multiple doors buttressed by logs and fixed firmly with iron nails: and seeing them, the elephants shall charge at them with coiled trunks with their triumphant banners streaming high and ignoring their *mahouts'* *ankus* they shall proceed to ram the doors and none can stop them in their rampage. Hence even if it means your return home is little delayed, you must deviate from the route you have chosen and take another, that this fort may be saved, O Chēralāda!

54

WHEN your foemen march and camp in the land of another king, your ally and friend, annexing all the land betwixt and the men beat the drum at a thundering pitch (kept in the centre of the army camp) to urge the fighters onward to battle, their leading fighters brandish maces all hearkening to the call of the drum followed by the arrayed neophytes: and these in formation meet your men. When your men see the elephants they tarry not but rush to fight them: you are the leader of such plucky men!

I have heard you praised as a generous giver and so I have come eager to see you! Fulfil my heartfelt longings, O King, may your head-wreath last for ever! Singing girls with dazzling jewels, whose hair attracts the humming bees, whose big shoulders resembling bamboos sport broad bangles which are hollow within, whose eyes are cool and whose rising bosom has delicate designs painted on it — these girls wearing embroidered skirts sing ballads praising your martial might. You offer to all that throng your court famous jewels all the days of your life to eradicate their penury and none that comes is turned away. As you are cast in such a mould may you live for long epochs in this wide earth, in your kingly state! May it be granted that you do not leave this earth for a brief stay even in the heavens!

55

LORD of the paragon among virtuous women! Purveyor of the good! Fiery warrior! I have come eager to see you, O King! In the storehouses in your capital town on the shore of the sea where bowers abound where the blooming *thāzhai* scents the air, the boundless wealth of jewels is kept brought in ships which cross the sea where the ceaseless waves raise sweet music. You are the lord of the seaboard too and the fertile, productive hinterland.

You are like a protective armour worn by your warriors who have for their food rice and fat steak cooked together and *chutney* obtained by grinding gram with pieces of red meat to so fine a paste the final product looks white in colour, O King of the Western people who own chariots sporting streaming banners!

If you do not have suppliants you have them brought to your capital town from far-off places in your chariots and derive pleasure by feeding them! Your truthful words have such a charm they bind the hearer forever to you, O mighty monarch of deathless fame! Kings who were ruling over wide domains are left lamenting over the fate of their armed forces which fought your men while you with your anger calming down capture their lands on the slopes of mountains and annex them all to your territory. Your manly nature loves the thrill of a fencing duel with your shining sword engaging your tenacious foe with a zeal to win that never flags!

From out of the span of your life, O King, that has been laid down by destiny, when most has been spent, the balance left should not dissipate into nothingness like the glossy clouds that sustain life which, after giving up their precious load get blown away to thin wisps of white to the summit of a mountain; may it wax!

56

CHĒRALĀDA is not a skilled dancer in the spacious city that is permeated by the joyful spirit of a festival day, in front of a group of artistes in tune with the drum that is beaten by them. He is no dancer: may his head-wreath live! But he dances about with a martial gusto in the battlefield where triumphant drums are beaten urging the fighters on, where under the prompting of their ignorance the foemen kings all rush to battle filled with hatred and fall defeated shuffling off their mortal coil, to inherit life in the hero's heaven; the Chēralāda with sword upraised shining with the jewels which he wears and the *uzhingnai* creeper made of gold dances merrily in the field of battle!

57

FAIR artiste that does not wear too many bangles! shall we walk the soft terrain with our dainty feet—shall we go to the Chēralāda?

The women of his palace whom he loves, who have presented him with the gift of children who delight his heart by their childliness and who shall be his props and help-mates, these lovely women with lustrous foreheads whose control over their minds and senses under the stern dictates of the moral law and the brilliance of their intellect all served to build up their deathless fame—these royal women, sometimes wroth, did look daggers at you O King! But you dread the looks of longing, more, made poignant by prolonged suffering of suppliants who come to you!

Let us repair to the Chērā's court and play the *pālaippaṅ* strumming the string made taut by the low-lying screw in the big lute played with fingers, carried by the songsters who then harmonise their sweet voices with the special lutes and sing the *thazhinji*

on your martial glory. Let us go singing, men and women, to feast our eyes on the Chērā king who sits triumphant in his battle-camp that stinks of rotting human flesh. The king of the Chērās after his victory over foemen who keep the heroes' code never to flee the field of battle celebrates by dancing the *thuṅangai* with his wreath of big palmyra flowers and his hero's tinklers worn on the leg all rendered crimson by the splash of blood from the sundered bodies of the warriors who were overwhelmed in the battlefield!

58

THE dry lands where the *vēl* trees grow in numbers with a sparse foliage — trees which harbour in their coarsened trunks crickets that make the woods resound with the notes of their music, are cultivated by farmers endowed with powerful hands who plough them with bullocks skilled in the job, whose neck-bells tinkle with the movements made: along the furrows where the ploughshare went shoot up sheaves of shining grain. The Chērā is the lord of the spacious lands where such bounty can be seen.

His fighters wearing wreaths of white palmyra blooms with which are wreathed the lovely blossom of the *kuvaḷai* plant and bearing scars of glory earned by the sharp edge of foemen's swords come down brandishing their killer weapons like bolts of thunder on the enemy ranks taking the vow that though they had fed with gusto before the start of the siege they would not eat till they pierce the mud walls of the foemen's fort. The great one is the master of these valiant men who want to be true to the wreath of flowers worn on their heads — a symbol of courage. The king of the Chērās, the Vānavaramban, is the armour that protects these fighting men whose steadfast adherence to veracity raises the level of all they utter, whose well-formed hands brandish the bow and arrows that take the foemen's forts and whose heroes' chests are broad and handsome. Wise men praise the Chērā king in these terms — high laudation! Dance, ye girls! Sing ye bards! in the august presence of the Chēralāda!

59

IN the month of *Māsi* when the days are short and nights are long and every where the animals suffer from the biting cold, to

the joy of the bard who plans to cross the tortuous paths that are desolate, the sun appears in the east resplendent spreading his many rays of light that annihilate the wide-spread darkness dispelling the distress of the living world and ushers in the dawn that ends the evil night. Just like the sun that rises in the eastern heavens you reign over the western kingdom raising the level of the suppliants and giving succour to the world of men.

For the archers versed in all the arts you serve as the armour that protects them. The paramount emperor over all the kings who have annexed glory in fields of battle, you succour and protect those in trouble that seek asylum in your kindly court. The wealth that comes from your far-flung domains from the mountainous tracts and from the seas — tracts that differ in soil and in clime — gets allocated under your benign care to all the branches of your government — that the constant pursuit of the moral law never in the least gets out of gear.

There is a duty that is cast on you, O great monarch, with well-formed shoulders which are studied by anxious foemen kings: you have to cherish and succour the lands which, in vassaldom, pay tribute to you in the shape of countless and valued gifts. Kings ranged against you who only think of their own valour and not of yours rush to battle and are worsted by you. They surrender and in meek submission they bring tribute: may your wrath subside and may you accept the tribute offered! And may the wreath you wear on the head, symbol of a hero, bloom forever!

60

THE Chērā's kingdom is rich, productive! The avenues there are flanked by trees so tough they resist the cutting blade, laden with fruits that ripen in the branches, on whose thick skin swarm buzzing bees, which are bursting with sweet honey, whose exquisite flavour is sealed within, fruits which resemble eggs in shape and which are garnered by wayfarers, to allay their fatigue and their hunger.

In the coastal town of the Chērā's kingdom, *Naravu,* where the cold sea breeze that wafts the foamy spume of the sea with the

clouds that settle on the top of the waves makes the warriors who never rest from aiming arrows, tremble with the cold, the king can be seen in the company of girls of exquisite grace and beauty. The leader of fighters who love to fight and himself athirst for the thrills of war, in spite of the company he keeps of girls, he gives freely of the booty of war to those in need: so shall we, songstress, journey to the place where the king is camping?

SEVENTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

SELVAKKADUNGŌ Vāzhiādan was born of the queen, the daughter of Oruthanthai and of king Anduvanchēral who, with unabated enthusiasm, took prisoner his enemies and who possessed subtle book-learning. Vāzhiādan founded many new towns in his country. He defeated his enemies who were forced to flee the field of battle. He thus triumphed in many wars with the help of his army that struck fear in the hearts of his foes. He performed big and famous sacrifices and at the same time observed other acts and rituals enjoined by the Scriptures. He fixed in his mind the image of the dark-hued Thirumāl. He donated to Him the town called Okandūr wherein grew the type of paddy most suitable for the conduct of the ritual *agnihōtram.* (He developed his knowledge of Scripture and Ethics) in such a way as to stun and surprise his priest. On Vāzhiādan of a rich and fertile mind and of blameless conduct, Kapilar composed ten songs.

Kapilar got as the lesser largess a lakh of gold coins: in addition he got all the lands which the king could see on getting on top of the hill *Nanrā.*

Selvakkadungō Vāzhiādan ruled for twenty-five years.

61

PĀRI the lord of the Parambu hill where the fruit of the jack tree cracks up, ripe, and the honey oozing from the fissures is disseminated by the northern wind, Pāri, my king, whose royal palace is handsome like a picture, well-designed, whose queen is handsome as the *Kolli* icon, the foe of the oracular *unnam* tree with its coarsened trunk and gold-coloured bloom and with its head of dimunitive leaves, Pāri, our monarch with his hero's chest with its fragrant unguent of sandal paste that dries up on its broad expanse but whose generous instincts never go dry — Pāri has departed, the

matchless patrons to those distant realms whence none returns, leaving the poor to bemoan his loss with the paste on the drums all drying up forsaken by the songsters in destitution!

In your war camp stinking of rotting flesh where dazzling swords and mighty elephants are on display and the female artiste sings of the javelin that flashes white like the light of the moon in the firmament, moving her hand which sports no bangles in step with the strokes of the musician's drum — the war camp filled with noisy gaiety like the village square on a festival day — I come to see you, O Kadungō! I do not seek your patronage since Pāri is dead; I shall not flatter, nor disparage your fair renown. I have heard you praised as a generous giver who never covets what he has given, never exults at his munificence but waxes in his generous mood while occupied in the act of giving! I come to see you, O Kadungō drawn by the fame of your generous mien!

62

TRIUMPHANT King! your fighters start fires in the hapless enemy lands which crackle throwing sparks about — brilliant, awesome conflagrations so many and so blinding bright, they look like a thousand suns ablaze deluding the stricken people of the land of the vanquished enemy king. You rage like the vengeful God of Death who, roaring, ranges all the earth: yours is the acme in martial might! Your elephants decked with ornaments, big herds of them, and the infantry carrying dusky, cloudlike shields and the cavalry with trimmed manes which cut through the ranks of the enemy's men who were armed with swords and javelins, these units of your army marched to the strong-built fort that is hard to take, encircled it in a ruthless ring and camped outside the strong ramparts. The fort is surrounded by a moat where the water dashes against the banks: its walls are lofty like the hills. Those on the side of the enemy king have powerful arms with which to harass those that are ranged in war against them.

If, still, they down their arms and come in meek submission, with the due tribute, speaking the language of vassaldom, their land is saved! It prospers then and the farmers owning heads of cattle too many to count lead them all to rolling grass-lands where

they graze; they then sweep the grains of paddy, detached from the sheaves which were grown in the fertile fields, but not winnowed and gather them all into a heap in the shade of the spreading *kānchi* tree to offer in barter for pots of liquor. These strong-limbed farmers who deck their hair with the *āmbal* bloom that is rare to get quaff the beverage, driving off the striped bees with their throbbing wings which, drawn by the blossoms, annoy them.

The land is saved! It prospers then, this wide kingdom of your erstwhile foe, and earns in the world a fair renown, panegyrised by all the poets!

63

YOU do not bow but to the learned: you do not fear but the critical eye of your own friends; your dauntless courage marks you out as one apart! Your foemen cannot see your chest that is bared in all its full expanse—only the privileged girls of your harem can see it with its dangling wreath, handsome with its rain-bow blooms and sweet-scented with sandal paste.

You keep your words: you do not prove false to them over long epochs when even landscapes change their face. You lead your armies wearing wreaths of blooms of the small-leaved *uzhingnai* plant, in a fit of rage like a stroke of thunder by which hills are riven. The armies from the land of the great Tamils encircle two of the mightiest kings in a single move and defeat them, the battle being fought in such a way your army garners bounteous booty. You are the architect of such victories! You lead the armies of valorous men who carve out fame by their shining swords! Fighters who had notched up triumphs now get humbled in battles with you. They desert their masters and crossing over they swear they share your ideals and merge themselves with your own men! You are distinguished by the same valour and benevolence as your forebears were. And victory is always yours whoever it is you meet in battle.

Therefore, O scion of the Chērā race! O Selvakkadungō Vāzhiāda! if the good people of this far-flung world fenced by the sea where the wind-swept waves careen and crash to a

thunderous din — if they have conformed to the moral law and lived the lives of the pure and the good you shall live for countless years whose measure can only be the (mythical) concept like the *āmbal* and the *vel̤l̤am*, beyond the ken of ordinary mortals; may you deathless be!

64

MANY are the kings that have triumphant drums whose unfailing swords earn victories and golden jewels for them to wear, but you are apart from such a brood!

Brahmins with tongues that bear the skill of chanting scripture, sharpened by use and with their knowledge of the rites of sacrifice which enabled them to perform many of the famous ones, those that throng your court receive presents of jewels that are proffered by you with the pouring of water as enjoined. The water gathers in the muddy floor and turns into mire that is disdained by the elephants: in the protected camp which none but suppliants freely tread, if you happen to see an artiste hovering uncertain in the flank of the camp, you do not hesitate for even a moment but order your men to present him with horses with their well-kempt manes won in battle with the foemen fighters who brandished swords and javelins and to offer chariots that oscillate in a graceful fashion, decked with jewels. In the task of giving you know no limit nor respite nor any satiation!

Just as the sun resplendent climbs the dusky heights of the firmament destroying the light of the myriad stars, you shine, a scion of the Chērā race having crushed the might of the challengers. Your jewels, O monarch of deathless fame, lie loose on your person: you shower gifts in greater profusion than the clouds that rise in the heavens with their load of water darker far than the glossy petals of the handsome bloom of the *neidal* plant that blossoms in the dark, wide back-waters. Your fame waxes as you feed the kinsmen who need food: to your battle camp I come praising your valorous feet that I may feast my eyes on you!

65

O VĀZHIĀDA! leader of men who fight their battles the *Kānchi* way — battles where horses, fleet of foot, decked with crests that oscillate get their hooves all red and gory when they tread on corpses felled by your fighters' feat of arms, battles where the might of the foes was crushed by your fighters who conform to the rules of warfare: you lead them all. You protect the archers like a shield: and for all the men in destitution who seek asylum in your court you are the bounty that succours them!

Lord of the queen with the graceful jewels whose bosom bedecked rising high is treated with all the cosmetics, whose eyes are big whose abdomen with graceful lines, whose shoulders broad resembling bamboos, plump and full, all accentuate the comely form, whose chastity is of such a mien it controls even the God of Love, whose fragrant forehead scents the air not only nigh but from afar, too.

Purveyor of bards with all their kin, you are the wealth of suppliants! O King, decked with shining necklaces on the hero's chest of wide renown! just as a musician skilled in strumming the *pālai* lute with the sweet-toned strings plays all the tunes, in succession, sweet-melancholy, of *pālaippaṅ* you distribute pots of liquor which, fermented, tastes bitter-sweet (like showers of rain which turn the earth into sticky mire) to those in the court which takes on a gay and festive look. I am happy that I could see all this joy and merriment of your daytime camp, O Vāzhiāda!

66

OH aged bard, who ordain your life in full accord with rectitude! You are on the road to the Chērā's town strumming the strains of the *pālaippaṅ* on the giant lyre that is designed to give the full range of musical pleasure—the lyre with a curved dusky handle and fitted with many sweet-toned strings.

The array of the Chērā infantry is so designed it thwarts the thrust of angry foemen whose assault is well contained by the Chērā forces. His men who wield the javelins fashioned in steel and flash-

ing bright rise for the battle, their shields upraised like a mountain, early at dawn, where on the top the rain-clouds float. His men fence with their shining swords like a garland writhing over the chest. These fighters wreath the snow-white bloom of the palmyra with the stamened flowers of the *vāhai* tree that is dear to the heart of the presiding deity of victory.

This two-coloured wreath is even like the bush of the *mullai* blooming white where swarm the dusky humming bees — the bees which leaving the *mullai* bush settle on the branches of the *pidava* bloom which look as if some human hand has wreathed them in their jungle state. In the stony ground where white and red alternate, the natives find shining gems among the coloured stones. Vāzhiādan is the lord of all this rich land of vast teeming towns.

This king when his wrath is roused swears vengeance on the offender and sets forth on a martial sally with drums that sound like thunderclaps, meets the foemen in the battlefield — the foemen who wield javelins — and destroys their martial valour: a few among them flee the field but most of them are killed in battle — in the fateful field that is thickly strewn with corpses of the enemy dead. The foeman king brings elephants as his tribute long overdue. The wise declare he gives away these elephants to the suppliants. He gives away great quantities of the vital food, grains of paddy, measuring them in packed measures — so many of them that the mouths of the measures crack up and their rim made of copper comes off loose; king Vāzhiādan gives away valued presents to the suppliants!

67

IN the field of battle where he makes remorseless war on the enemy kings his men keen to harry the foe seek new weapons when they lose the armament they held before. His army presses ever onwards, its lofty banners waving high signifying his victory. His buglers blow the jewelled horns and the conchs with the clockwise whorl; his elephants, moving herd by herd from their resting place to the field work havoc in the foemen's ranks. In the fateful field corpses lie and carcasses of animals slain on which big-winged eagles settle to gorge themselves on the gushing blood. The trunks

of fighters with heads cut off dance about with a manly gusto and fierce goblins keep company, a spectacle that brings terror to those who happen by the field.

He notched a mighty victory which sent tremors through the hearts of the subjects of the vanquished king. His fighters of a noble mien wear, as their head-wreaths, garlands wreathed with the white bloom of the palmyra variegated by the fragrant bloom, in bunches, of the *konrai* tree. Like the scarred base-board made of wood on which lowly cruel butchers slaughter with steel knives the big-eyed bulls with spreading horns and other beasts with curved heads for their carcasses which they sell for a livelihood, the bodies of these valiant men are serrated with a myriad scars made by the edge of foemen's swords — so much that the sandal paste they wear on their hero's chest does not cover these depressions. Vāzhiādan is the leader of all such dauntless warriors!

He is the king of the lofty hill, the *Nēri*, famed in song and ballad where the blossom of the *kānthal* plant dear to the Gods now plays the host to a dragon-fly that lingers long feeding on the pollen whose sweetness makes the fleet-winged guest reluctant to leave its floral residence! O bard, skilled in the complex art of the lute with all its nuances, if you go praising the Chērā king, with your kinsmen of fair renown, you shall get as royal presents, pearls from the south sea and ornaments from the town known as *Kodumaṅam* and the city of fair renown, *Pandar* of hoary antiquity.

68

WHEN you leave your capital town with your army to meet your foes, the womenfolk, distraught with love in separation keep awake all the night through and waste away till their jewels come off loose. In their vast houses encircled by mud walls that reach to the skies they scratch with fingers reddened far with exercise, the count of days still left over for the reunion on the high wall, glossier than a painted panel. These women marked by handsome lines and tinklers in their dainty feet and the beauty that torments lookers-on have set their hearts with burning passion on your chest with its sandal paste.

The fighters that live in the protective shade of your feet, when they all sally forth seeking conquests, camp in the land of the enemy: the main war drum kept in the war camp is struck with sticks to raise a din of such impact as makes the vast firmament reverberate like the ocean's face struck by the drumstick of the tornado. These men, abjuring nutriment till they take the foemen's fortress whose walls display designing skill to please the eyes of the looker-on, are still agog to fight the foes — they love the thrill of the battlefield — and are set to crush the enemy who is all famished and discouraged, and much the worse for all the fighting.

But once the foe is subjugated, your men kill the elephant on which rides the enemy king and plucking its tusk they repair to the liquor shop identified in the bazaar by the streaming flag, and handing over the ivory as the price for the valued beverage, at quits, they drink, a delighted group: this eager, happy group of men are happier far than the residents of Northern Kuru where fear is nought, where men enjoy, freed from pain, unmitigated happiness! But all this will be theirs when the foe is crushed and not till then. Will your fighters ever get such hours of bliss, O Vāzhiāda?

69

UNDER your able captaincy your army sallies boldly forth: on the elephants big as hills are mounted your flags of victory lofty, scratching the firmament: they progress streaming in the breeze resembling foamy waterfalls that cascade down a mountain slope. The army surging like the sea with the drums of war steadily beaten, sounding like the waves raised by the wind, marches forward with the fencers whose swords are broken in the fight and the fighters wielding javelins whose head is spread out like a leaf and the horses tired with their running and pouncing on the enemy ranks. The army with its hand-picked men who love the thrill of the battlefield crushes the foemen, piling up high heaps of corpses in the field.

You restore in the conquered land the fallen subjects, raising them to their high status held before. O victorious Vāzhiāda! under your forebears' benign rule, the yield from the land was

abundant, the heat of the sun was tempered down, the planet Venus, benevolent, stood in the heavens along with the stars that generate an abundant life. The skies were filled with dusky clouds that nourished all created things. All the world that is distinguished by the four directions produced food in abundant measure: in the land there was no part that produced little: there was no desert in their time. The shining wheel of the kings' rule rolled on without let or hindrance. They happily were ruling over this dense earth—your forebears all—who in steadfast conformity to kingly ideals can rightly be compared to you, O Vāzhiāda!

70

YOUR doughty warriors with their feet decked with bangles symbolising supremacy in the art of war—feet well practised in spurring on elephants in the battlefield—feet whose inside edge is trained to direct horses in their charge on the enemy in the field. These men have broken foemen's ranks, harassed them and secured triumphs by their javelins and by their bows wielded with the power of their muscular shoulders developed during wrestling bouts with stone pillars to harden them. These men wreath palmyra flowers, white in colour and sharp like a bud, which does not attract humming bees, mixed with the *kuvaḷai* bloom that grows in the sweet water of mountain pools and wear it as the heroes' head-wreath: filled with the pride of all fighting men they take on wrathful enemy kings who were used to wars and triumphs and destroy all their martial might and their undisputed dominance, by means of warfare, just and fair. Vāzhiāda, you lead such men!

You are so set on veracity you utter no falsehood even in fun. You cannot endure disdaining words spoken by foes behind your back! You have blemishless discernment! You wear jewels on your hero's chest! You are the lord of the noble queen whose handsome forehead emits a fragrance whose nature is bashful, feminine and whose life courses serenely only on the straight and narrow path of the highest virtue, chastity!

You propitiated by sacrifices the devas, with your noble kin of constant virtue, unswerving, always near you in attendance! You pleased the sages residing in the heavens by your vedic chanting.

You have pleased all the ancestors, the forebears of the Chērā clan, bringing forth children who shall be your youthful props when you grow old — children that, at once, are humble when in the presence of the great and are unbending when facing foes! Thus in your life have you discharged the hoary debts, Vāzhiāda, O King that always win your battles!

May you live with life-span waxing, changeless like the *Ayirai* mountain where in every lofty summit waterfalls in dense profusion cascade down, reverberating like gigantic drums, whereof the din is heard by Gods in their golden worlds.

EIGHTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

PERUNCHĒRAL Irumporai was born the son of Selvakkadungō (whose pelf always succoured the destitutes) and of the daughter of Vēḷāvikkōmān Paduman. He fought a battle with Athiyamān of the great army armed with javelins, who had allied himself with the two great kings (the Chōlā and the Pāndyā), on the top of a well-watered hill in the *Kolli* country. He defeated the allies and captured as booty the wardrum, the umbrella and jewels belonging to them and performed a martial sacrifice in the field of his famous victory. He thus destroyed the might of Athiyan while the latter's queens of spotless conduct lamented and he captured his capital Takadūr with its great walls.

Arisilkizhār of unblemished truth sang ten songs on Perunchēral Irumporai of great might and unsullied reputation.

As the largess for the panegyric, the king with his queen stood outside the palace saying that all that was in it was the poet's. The king offered him nine lakh gold coins and even the Chērā throne. But the poet said, 'I now beg of you another favour. You rule over the land as king and I shall serve you as minister.' This arrangement was accepted and Arisilkizhār became the Chērā Minister.

Perunchēral Irumporai who conquered Takadūr ruled for seventeen years.

71

GREAT one! Your foes that rise against you get scattered by your armed might like children of an age when they do not know the consequences of their pranks and stir up a nest of angry wasps in dense formation, slumbering — angry wasps whose sting is fearful, that resemble the measure stuck in a heap of soft red paddy grains

threshed by teams of big buffaloes in the barn where the farmers' wives foregather all to cut the sheaves and garner them with the rare blooms of *āmbal* and of the *neidal* blue in vast rich and fertile fields from where flows this unending pelf—like the children struck by panic, your foemen pell-mell flee the field!

The fires you start in the battlefield consume the towns of the beaten foe and the stinking smoke that rises thence, acrid, heavy, spreads everywhere and, shroud-like, covers the firmament. The beaten enemy sought refuge in the safety of his guarded fort unmindful of the ridicule such cowardly conduct would inspire. You then stormed their guarded fort with the broad and deep encircling moat and clefts in the wall with narrow steps from whence the enemy archers aimed arrows at you, themselves concealed and you destroyed the foes' redoubt and won the battle and the siege.

The cowherds of the beaten land then came to you with gifts of cattle, cowherds who live on milk and butter — they brought bulls before their victors, they brought cows along with the calves; your men with bows that stank of flesh, forgiving in their finest hour, were won over by such liberal gifts and gave them back the heads of cattle. And the leader of them, *Kazhuvul*, wishing to see you comes at the hour when the churning is over but the day has not broken, when night still lingers, comes before you with head bowed down submissive and is forgiven!

You strike your camp and leave the land for towns predestined to utter ruin; the kings of these towns when they see your mighty army on the march think of their lands that nourish them with a fresh produce every year, the wealth bequeathed through the royal line and tremble at the awesome sequel. You appear as a vengeful spirit that can be staved off not by might but by meek propitiation. They worship you and give the tribute in the shape of battle elephants great in size with spots on their foreheads that stand up bravely in the teeth of pressure from the foemen's ranks right where the battle rages thick, and for ample measure, ornaments. Like a spirit that spares the life of its faithful votary accepting the sacrifice he is offering you take the gifts and spare their lives! May you live, O Irumporai the full span vouchsafed by the Gods! Worthy monarch! If you do not discriminate between the acts of the wise

among your subjects and of the dullards, and approve with grace, the former, those with wisdom and repudiate the latter ones, who shall have an abundant life, how shall the world subsist, even? The world of men depends upon your royal flair, O Irumporai for such discernment, wisely done!

72

ACTUATED by their ignorance, your foes fail in their assessment of your uniquely great qualities — qualities like those possessed by ministers who, impelled to serve the cause of the subjects, used to give the kings of yore, your ancestors, wholesome counsel in full accord with the moral law, that the kings ruled wisely and well to promote the weal of all the people in the land.

O wrathful King, when enemies show up, you quit your pleasant ways and all your festive gaiety and rise in fury: you resemble the *vadavā* fire and the suns that rise and spread out in the sky to quell the dense encircling gloom in the evening of this planet's life when all the living things in it are destroyed in a cataclysm of floods that lighten the earth's burden — angry floods encompassing, engulfing all by means of waves when boundaries all disappear and the earth and the sky and the directions all merge in a mass of surging waters, you resemble the fire and the suns that send down rays of a ruddy hue to dry the spume and quell the waves and battle with the angry waters!

So those that want to offer battle are urged by the hate which they harbour in their hearts; they do not consider the factors that make for victory but plunge into battle against you; they take no steps to defend their land against your sallies that are planned in retribution, O Irumporai. None but those that are blinded by hate takes you on in the field of battle!

73

BE it the wise or be it those that lack the gift of discernment, in drawing parallels every one is apt to compare the others with you, never you with the others, O Irumporai, of unequalled royal qualities! You are the standard against which others are measured every time.

You are the lord of the Chōlā land of fertile well-watered rolling plains where girls who chase the roving cranes from the widespread fields where rice is grown keep on wearing their jewels of gold of handsome design, through the day nor take them off even at night—land of gaiety where the girls can dance the *kuravai* everywhere both in the towns and the villages set close together—where the girls can dance with joy unabated—land that is nourished by the *Cāuvery* where the greenery and the handsome sights of *Puhār* appear to the traveller even from afar, you are the lord of this land of the *Cāuvery* and of *Puhār*, the city of pelf.

You are the master of *Pūzhi* land for whose natives you serve as the shield! Lord of the *Kolli*, the hilly land where verdant grows the bamboo copse and clouds settle on the mountain tops! King of the mountainous Chērā land whose chariots ply with banners raised! That your pelf and your valour and your generous propensities are beyond men's powers of comprehension, I keep repeating to your foes many a time but they will not learn: I wondered if they will learn about you if other men of wisdom try to communicate all this to them, but to no avail: the foes persist in their woeful state of ignorance. I feel sad that I know not how to disseminate among your foes these unique titles to your royal glory.

74

THOSE in your land with the expertise roaming over hills and mountains sought the deer of the special kind with glossy spots all over its body and spreading antlers looking like a branching twig and skinning it they removed all the bits of flesh and polished it and made it shine; they then had the glossy skin cut to a round shape and the edge sewed up by a skilful craftsman operating with a steel needle who set bright gems along the hem procured from the town *Kodumaṅam* and pearls from *Pandar* praised by all. The skin was set with a central gem of such a wondrous ruddy hue the eagle flying in the air marked it down as a piece of flesh!

The bejewelled skin fit to be worn your queen dons: the handsome lady who wears this on her lovely shoulders, whose hair is soft and delicate like black sand and her frontal curls falling over a lustrous forehead, the lady that is like Goddess Thiru in all respects except

the way She came into being and the queen was born, became pregnant for the perpetuation of yours, the royal Chērā line; at the end of ten months, when it was due, she bore you a son for the good of those that inhabit this world, a boy blessed with native good sense and a capacity to receive instruction as a prince that would fit him for his future role, instruction that the boy imbibed with such zeal he has mastered the art of governance: his qualities like a balanced mind and other traits have developed to a perfect state.

You have, O King, sat at the feet of masters, learning scriptural texts and to the delight of noble men you have performed sacrifices observing the vows prescribed. O mighty King that love warfare! You thus have repaid the three-fold debt!

But truth to tell, I am not overwhelmed with surprise at this achievement. You have by means of your own penance demonstrated to your preceptor grown grey with age, who had studied all the scriptures and taught them too and regulated others' conduct in strict accord with their maxims, — you have taught the hoary priest that only those who have performed great penance are blessed with charity and wealth and all the noble traits and progeny — even an awareness of divinity, as a result whereof the preceptor left for the great forests to perform penance: it is this that overwhelms me, O mighty King!

75

O MIGHTY monarch, Irumporai, you have javelin corps and chariots quick to move and elephants decked with wreaths of golden blossoms! You resemble the mighty lion that is distinguished by handsome signs on its body, the lion that kills the terrible tiger and unfatigued, takes on a mighty elephant!

If kings and chieftains do not bow to your will and toe your line, dire is the sequel! For today, their lands yield a rich rice crop and they are fenced by sugar-cane which thrives so well, the paddy crop gets impeded in its growth: so the cane is cut and pressed for juice surpassing rich in sugar, yielding a continuing revenue that is distributed to those in need and none that comes is turned away. If these kings dare challenge you their fertile lands will be so despoiled

they cannot produce crops of paddy but only the coarser kinds of grain and horsegram which in the palmy days were given by the farmers of high drylands as reparations on their defeat by those that farm the low wet lands who gave them away as the price of liquor — all in the bygone palmy days.

These kings perforce will have to eat millet and gram which their lands produce in the place of the valued red paddy. How can they in such adversity rule over their country full of towns panegyrised by all the poets?

76

WHEN clouds foregather in the skies and descending shaft-like on the earth they dissolve in showers, cool and pleasant, farmers who own extensive lands but poorly equipped by way of ploughs deck their heads with handsome garlands wreathed with the *pahanrai* bloom that flowers in the cool waters of the running brook — garlands that look like washed white clothes — and plough the lands: what do they harvest? They do not harvest merely grains, they garner gems with effulgent rays from the furrows where the ploughshare went! O King, the lord of such bounteous lands where there are big and teeming towns! Your men carrying swords and javelins march to the battle fiercely fought with elephants and the infantry arrayed in awesome formation by the enemy kings wielding swords; your fighters crush the enemy forces which are overwhelmed by your might and to celebrate this victory they beat their drums with powerful sticks.

After this victory secured by their martial might that has no equal even as fishermen on their return from a fishing sally repair the boats to make them strong and seaworthy, your fighters tend the long-trunked herd of elephants injured in the field, relieve their suffering and make them well.

Your battle camp is full of the things seized from the enemy as your booty. Having gifted the elephants to the suppliants through all the forenoon you make presents of hordes of horses to those that come in the afternoon. I have come, O King, with a thirst to see this unique orgy of charity.

77

STRANGERS! Wayfarers! you wish to know the size of the army of the king, the wrathful fighter, Irumporai: listen well when I recount all the glories of the Chērā army! Many are the horses, many the men, many are the chariots fashioned so they can cruise with speed with their wheels that do not wear out even when they roll over the corpses in the field—corpses of foemen, one-time heroes who had danced the *thuṅangai* dance raising shoulders and waving hands celebrating their victories, now put to the sword by your fighters who routed their ranks and killed their king. The army units of Irumporai are so many I cannot count them: his elephants straining at the peg wrench free themselves, dodging the keepers whose *ankus* applied to check the brutes gets badly twisted and out of shape, and seeing the shadow on the ground of a flying eagle, they charge at it provoked to a fit of senseless rage. These elephants of the Chērā king resemble the herds of cattle which the cowherds of the Kongu land all wielding digging implements spread for grazing over the parched ground, pebbly as far as eyes can see. So many there are, these elephants, they are beyond count: I see them all but figure their numbers I cannot do.

78

ARTISTE, with but a few bangles! You want to see Irumporai? Do you notice a towering hill on the slopes of which white waterfalls cascade down with a clear, loud roar, very much like the sound of of drums beaten to proclaim victory? That is the hill of the Chērā king! That is the hill of the conqueror of the well-defended Thakadūr fort!

How was the fort, how the land of the enemy king before the conquest? Delicate girls with graceful gait plucked the lotus with delicate petals and the *neidal* from the fertile plains and moved on to the drier woodlands where they sang to drive away the parrots that swarmed over the fields where there was a standing millet crop. Thakadūr had such productive tracts that purveyed all this abundant fruit, jungle villages and jungle towns and protective forests equipped with armament like bows and arrows wielded by its skilled fighters who thirst for the thrill and the triumph, incessantly, of the

battlefield. The Chērā forces stormed the fort and fought these men of Thakadūr whose averted look strikes abject fear into the hearts of their opponents: the Chērā army crushed their might which had been the cause of all their victories till the Chērā came, and destroyed all their equipment with which they had fought all their battles, and on the day of this victory the enemy land was overrun by the horses of his cavalry, numberless like the Kongu sheep and by the Chērā elephants countless like their grazing cattle; yonder is the seat of the triumphant Chērā, the king and lord of all these forces!

79

O KING, yours is the gifted tongue whose splendour owes to truthfulness! Yours is the might that quells the spirit of those that do not bow to you! Yours is the chest on which the wreath is crushed to pulp by the jewelled shoulders when you lock the queen in tight embrace! You do not regard your own life as of value in the battlefield; you do not regard anything as too big for you to give away when men in need do throng your court. You revere the great; you succour those who are giftless and suffer from penury. Your fame that has spread everywhere is not coveted even in their dreams by other men with crowned heads. Your qualities are such they cannot be measured or even comprehended. Your foes had seen powerful kings humbled by you in the field of battle.

These bold kings did not toe your line, did not come under your sovereignty: they made war against your forces and they showered a rain of arrows from their perch on elephants whose hair stood on end with the thrill and excitement of the awesome fight. But your men cut the enemy's bowstrings and killed the kings and crushed their men and notched a mighty victory.

The foes had seen and heard all this but undefeated in their encounters, emboldened by constant victories they came to fight the Chērā forces. The Chērā fighters tore up the eye of the war drums of the challengers and while the royal elephant trumpeted in its misery its tusks were sawn off and were used in the making of a sacred bed on which the fighters, all fatigued with waging the *Tumbai* form of war seated themselves and opened up their recent wounds on their chests and sprinkled the blood in sacrifice to the

sacred mountain, the *Ayirai*, where sits the deity of warriors — the mountain that inspires terror by its traditions and that will not be propitiated otherwise than by the blood from heroes' chests. May your fame, O Irumporai, be as steadfast and as eternal as this mountain, the *Ayirai*!

80

WHEN your enemies come to war with your forces, their elephants, mighty and fierce with silver tusks, stand athwart like huge mountains and their war drums reverberate like thunder from the monsoon clouds. Their fighting men with sandal paste dried up in their heroes' chests whose powerful arms are lighted up with the rays from their gem-set shoulder-clasps, whose muscle-bound shoulders carry wounds which are hard to heal, sustained in wars, who wear garlands round their necks and heroes' tinklers on their feet — these men whose dogma it always is never to retreat from where they tread, brandishing dazzling swords had come to fight it out with the Chērā forces.

Your men, the brave Chērā warriors armed with arrows in their right and with the bow in the other hand walk before their arrayed foemen exhorting them to pay tribute to the Chērā king who protects those that toe his line in vassaldom, praising your many attributes, all which, in truth, you do possess!

You dominate the fiercest battles and world-wide fame is yours, O King! And your learning is of the spotless kind. Your wars are fought in your foes' domain. When such is the case how can they — your foemen — drive their chariots drawn by horses fleet as the tornado with streaming banners tied to the tops? How can their chariots fleet as the wind roll on at will in any land? What chance have they, your challengers?

NINTH DECAD

PATHIKAM

KUTTUVAN Irumporai and his queen Chellai the daughter of Maiyūrkizhān Vēnmāl Anduvan begot a son. He went forth striking terror, along with an awe-inspiring army and defeated the Chōlā and the Pāndyā monarch along with Vichi seizing the five forts on a hill with a protective forest difficult for an army to penetrate. He had taken a terrible oath and in fulfilment there of he defeated the Chōlā who had secured Pothi's friendship and the Ilam Pazhayan Māran who was the friend of Viththai. He brought the booty to Vanji, his ancient capital and distributed it to those in need. He worshipped the Gods in accordance with the tradition of chanting. He made his truthful minister Maiyūrkizhān better-versed than his priest who was an adept in the correct performance of rituals. He set up the deities of great and awe-inspiring power in the street squares where they love to dwell. He performed rituals calculated to ensure peace, in accordance with long established practice. This Ilanchēral Irumporai who had the sceptre that unfailingly stood for the protection of his subjects and the drum that possessed a sweet sound was praised by Perunkunrūrkizhār in ten poems.

The king pleased at this wanted to surprise even those who cannot be surprised and so gave the poet thirty-two thousand gold coins and without his knowledge enriched his house and his village with farming implements, jewels and all other forms of wealth in countless measure with a protecting largess for the poet's use.

Ilanchēral Irumporai lord of the West ruled for sixteen years.

81

IT is the season of the monsoon rains. Clouds roll by in the firmament dense and dusky, filled with the water that succours all

the living world, and awesome with their peals of thunder that send tremors through all living things and lightning flashes lighting up the vast expanse of the dusky skies—all indicative of the season of monsoon rains that torment life. Just now, in the season of rains your war camp is bustling, busy. Elephants roam at the edge of the camp: the fleetest horses with men atop move about at the riders' will, chariots with banners streaming, bright and lofty ramble free with impunity everywhere, unafraid of the enemy men who stand guard at the city's gates; your fighters disdain protective cover and the numerous gadgets to guard their station: even during the darkest hours of the long night they roam at will, the expanse of their battle camp, with their shoulder bangles shining bright, the insignia of matchless valour, and their shirts loosely fastened at their shoulders, battle-hungry men who long for the thrill of battle where injured, they may fall and die, restless men who proclaim loudly their vaulting plans for the morrow's fight, their only aim the acquisition of lasting fame for their martial line. Mighty king who can take the war to the country of the foemen kings! Your men loot the hapless land even before it falls to your hand and they melt all the jewels of gold and obtain bars of the purest metal of matchless hue and effulgence that are distributed as the token of recognition by a grateful prince, of courage and of skill in battle assessed by a panel of judges. War hungry prince! your handsome queen who resides in your capital town is attended on by a bevy of girls, her playmates wearing jewels that spit effulgence even as lightning flashes: these girls deck their hair with blooms of jasmine interspersed with leaves got from the verdant *Kolli* hills where bees foregather in the slopes, where the rich with all their kin, wearing the bloom of the *kānthal* plant feast on the jack fruit, drum-like, huge and as if it were a festive day, quaff the liquor sweet and flavoured, that has been matured in the cavity of a dusky bamboo newly cut, and celebrate in noisy gaiety, distributing what they need to the suppliants—such are the hills from which came the jasmine flowers that are wreathed to beautify the queen's playmates: with her handsome eyes that compete with her curly tresses for glossy splendour, with her pleasant speech of a tune with her lofty nature, with her comely face and ornaments surely your queen, O mighty King, merits a visit for a day at least! Ascend your chariot and speed your way to be by the side of your handsome queen; how she, on seeing her husband back shall revive! She shall deck her hair with flowers that draw a

swarm of bees that sitting on her dusky tresses shall quite blot out their natural hue; your coming back shall hearten her so greatly, king, the patch of pallor on her forehead shall vanish leaving the place resplendent with its wonted shine! If, O King, you leave the front to be with her for a day at least, the foemen kings along with the fighters who, loath to flee the field of battle keep on fighting and get weaker still nor can hope for a victory — these brave men who sleepless toss all night in bed, harassed, care-worn at what may befall their hoary line may get some sleep if so you leave! And your body, O mighty King, may secure its fulfilment in requited love if you leave the battle camp for your capital town!

82

YOU have set up your army camp, O mighty King Irumporai, in such a way it strikes terror into the hearts of the foemen fighters though your own men feel quite at home in the battle camp where the elephants expertly trained in the arts of war ramble restless after the holocaust where they had destroyed the foemen's corps of chariots with streaming banners of varied design: these elephants exuding rut which draws the bees and filled with rage do pose a problem to their keepers who send their cows to tame the rogues which mate with them but still untamed, they rage about, reckless giants, in the army camp.

Your men roam, their craze for war set on edge by the prolonged inaction of the enemy who, overawed by the might of your armed forces is engaged in the propitiation of the Gods for self-protection.

Your horses loaded with lethal weapons stand awaiting the drums of war. Chariots with banners streaming appear ready for a headlong rush, while the infantry that carries shields stands in the sides, all raising cain. Thus are the days in the army camp spent in cutting the forest wood and burning it to induce warmth, in the cold season, in their shivering bodies.

But yours is the pelf that registers no diminution despite your gifts to ceaseless waves of panegyrists: yours is the army, O Chēramān, that waxes big despite the wars where the foemen kill off your fighting men.

Wise men praise your generous heart, your sense of justice in governance, your great learning and your wisdom and your courage in the field of battle: your fame immortal spreads afar fed by these words of loving praise. Your possessions get always reinforced by the booty of your victories and the tribute paid by the vassal kings. Urged by all these qualities that mark you off from the other kings I come to feast my eyes on you, I come eager to sing your praise!

83

LIKE rows of cranes, their line-up tattered, flying against the dusky background of rain clouds sailing slowly by, the banners streaming on the tops of your chariots rolling fast in front of mighty elephants marching with fighters bearing shields are a pleasant sight for all to see, but to the kings who choose to fight you whose productive lands were broken up and jewels looted by your raging men — enemy kings who felt the brunt of your martial spirit and martial skill and to their men who fight for them, the march of your army forebodes ill; the sight of your army on the march — it hurts them sore, it gives them pain!

84

JUST as the war drum reverberates hit by drumsticks to make the eye — the dusky spot on the stretched membrane — vibrate to urge the fighters on, the rain clouds send out claps of thunder: on hearing them, the pachyderms in service in your elephant corps mistake them to be the sound of drums and cutting themselves free from the pegs that keep them bound, they march ahead, holding aloft their heads in the way of brave members of a fighting force — these beasts skilled in the arts of war repair direct without the guidance of their *mahouts* to the secret place from where they could, without being seen, study the enemy disposition!

Lord of *Pūzhi* whose fighting men brandish many a javelin! Chēramān of the golden chariot! to those that challenge your suzerainty, awesome and ruthless God of Death commissioned to mow down people! Your enemies do not count your might, do not realise how many elephants and horses you have pressed into service, do not think how limitlessly the walls of your rampart stretch away

to yon horizon, with streaming flags; ignoring the obvious sequence of provoking you to an armed conflict, and the fact that you are invincible that has been known so well to them, these foes do not bow in submission, but urged by a reckless recalcitrance, they come to war with a mighty force: the battle starts: the foemen wilt and suffer the fate of a bamboo shoot caught under the feet of an elephant, a young predator urged by rut and trumpeting like a thunderous cloud!

Now you are again at a battle camp. You and your fighters love the thrill, the thrust and parry of skirmishes. When the start of battle is proclaimed by the beating of the drum with stretched leather and javelins whose only aim is to inflict pain start getting hurled and ponderous elephants hit fatally, even like mountains thunder-riven, fall mightily in the field of battle, and men urged on by a love of battle grapple with the foe regardless of the physical risk and of the anguish and of the transience of the fruits of war. But in all such sallies your forces are always triumphant and at the end, your fighting men all celebrate accompanied by a terrific din — like the din from the mountain-slopes where the rain clouds that had lost their load of precious water over the lowlands where farmers start their operations with gusto, thus at being favoured, the clouds at long last favour the slopes with their life-sustaining gift of showers, stirring up the winged denizens from which proceed long-throated cries in variegated pitch and timbre, expressive of their exquisite pleasure. I see and hear all of this and the sight and the sounds do fill my heart when I stand in your battle camp, O Irumporai, in your hour of triumph.

85

YOU triumphed over the Chōlā forces who yielded many a fertile land full of trees that every year, in due season, get laden with fruit — land to be added to your own domains; then you issued a royal command to bind the Chōlā prince, whose mind was full to the brim with such doctrines as ran counter to those you hold — the Chōlā prince all richly decked with jewels of gold of rare design, you asked your men to bind the prince and bring him captive to your battle camp. The Chōlā warriors heard the words and forth with downed their javelins — O how many were downed by them, how to count these javelins!

The lofty mountain in your domains stands unmoving as your forebears stood unswerving from rectitude: there are streams with water sweet and richly verdant are the slopes; many and lofty are its peaks — so lofty, one can see from them the vast expanse of all your land! On its slopes in the teeming city of *Naravu* did your forebears hold their daily court in all its glory where vassals bowed in deep submission and meekly sought the emperor's orders where Kapilar of immortal fame whose mind was filled with the peace born out of a bold repudiation of mean self-seeking, envy, greed, who sang with the force of veracity, deathless verse that held up to laud your forebear's love of rectitude and fervour for the moral law and how they only drew the sword in defence of the moral order to subjugate the evil forces whose highest aim was to corrupt the world.

Now the javelins that were surrendered by the vanquished Chōlā forces were by far more in number than the towns your forebear gave away as largess to this truthful poet, to Kapilar of immortal fame.

86

WHENEVER people talk of Poraiyan they always praise his martial might, his awesome feats in the battlefield where he sheds such copious blood, all of it does not percolate into the soil of the field of war and the fluid stagnates in large pools, emitting a terrific stench. He does not resort to deceitful ways but kills his foemen in fierce combat by the sheer might of his powerful hands and the murderous javelin held in them. I have heard his feats of arms retold by men and I began to think urged by fear in my heart, 'what a terror this Chērā is! How pugnacious! What a carnage he inflicts on the world of men!'

All that is past: I comprehend the truly noble mien of the king: anxious to secure lasting fame in the wide world, the king gives away all that the needy want of him. He heals the woes of even those who have no talent for poesy: how much more will he not do for the gifted poets who throng his court? His heart is filled with abiding love for all mankind: his preoccupation, the enforcement of conformity of the strictest kind to the moral law. This great king with

the graceful gait is possessed of such a soft mien, of such cool, sweet propensities he reminds one of the *Vāni* river. The *Vāni* bearing sandal logs runs so deep that the barge pole though long cannot touch the bottom of the stream but when the girl who live on its banks plunge into it and play a while and realise, when they climb the bank that their ear ring handsomely wrought in gold is missing, they do not panic, for they can see the ornament clearly in the bed of the river all through the depth of the limpid water: the king's own nature is even like the limpid water of the *Vāni* river.

87

SONGSTRESS! Poraiyan, the Chērā king serves the needy in greater measure than even the raft of sugar-cane stems with which to cross the flooded river where the current bears a load of logs of the sandal and the *akil* tree — the flooded river whose ruddy waters topped by a silvery crest of foam gush their frothy, turbulent way, on to the sea of limpid waters — repair at once to the generous king for liberal gifts of jewels of gold!

88

HOW great have been your forebears all! When the Kadambās, lords of all the Vindhyās and more famous far than the Vindhyā range and the Vindhyā woods ruled over their large domains in the vast earth that is girt by the billowy seas, with royal justice that the land might prosper and spread their fame in all directions, your forebear crushed them in a great battle in the dusky sea where billows zoom by fighting them with javelins and cut to pieces the *kadambā* tree, their sacred symbol, their protected tree.

Another dealt a crushing blow to *Kazhuvul*, a bold challenger, pursued and cut to ruthless pieces all the kings on the enemy side who, panic-stricken, had begun to flee, and chased away his cowherd henchmen who were mounted on the fleetest horses. Another killed the foeman Nannan and root and branch destroyed the tree, the protected *vāhai* with its shining bloom.

These triumphant kings at the end of the war, your noble forebears of the Chērā clan, offered mounds of cooked rice kneaded

with the copious blood of the fallen heroes to the martial Goddess of awesome aspect that sits in the mountain *Ayirai*, while their vassals and even the proud Chōlā and the Pāndyā kings followed suit and offered worship!

O Irumporai, your lineage was so exalted, great and noble! Your own strength is that of a lion which sports a rich and verdant mane! You are the lord of the Kongu people whose war camp displays battle drums sounding in harmony nicely blending with the instruments of martial music, where shields upon shields are kept in rows and elephants restless roam about with streaming flags on their backs — battle camp where machines are kept which can throw big boulders at the ramparts of the enemy hideout and where pots of liquor, filtered through a layer of fibre are kept in store, mighty rider of the golden chariot! destroyer of the enemy forces! leader of the valiant Tondi men who regard the roar of the conch-filled sea as the beating of the drums of war!

Like the descent of the mighty river, with its gushing, roaring frothy waters from the *Ayirai* mountain where presides the martial Goddess, who is not pleased unless worshipped in the way laid down, whom fighters praise for victory in the *Tumbai* form of battle where musical instruments raise a din to accompany the fierce fighting — like the river cascading down, you shower gifts on the suppliants, and gifts of value, endlessly and none that comes is turned away; it would seem that your stock of things waxes with such generous giving!

In your palace that is beautiful even like a picture, commodious, and attended on by your lovely consorts, may you live long, shedding lustre like the sun that climbs the skies shedding effulgence every where! Your chest is marked by the distinct lines that form the hall mark of a valorous male, and by an unguent of sandal paste and a shining wreath of pearls on it with ornaments on both the shoulders. Your chest resembles a high mountain on which appears a well-bent rainbow where dusky rain clouds rent by forks of lightning bright as gems settle and the *vēngai* bursts into golden bloom, whose lofty summit scrapes the sky with streams in numbers rushing down.

You are the lord of the queen adorned with handsome jewels, whose reputation for chastity has spread everywhere: may you live for long, O King! your land prospers on the shore of the sea where verdant orchards, gardens green casting a cool shade grow up nourished by the lofty billows raised by intense winds that waft them shoreward, where they break the sandy beach! I came to your court, O Irumporai to see and to praise: I was drawn to you by your matchless fame: I have not come to you driven by want, as a suppliant!

89

WHEN timely rains do nourish the land, herds of does, bashful, feminine, graze in content in the succulent lea in the company of their chosen bucks. The birds in numbers perched on branches fill the air with raucous noises, reinforced by the hum of the bees. Fruits and tubers, nature's foods despite the demands made on them still grow apace and are bountiful. Cattle, sleek and in great numbers contented, graze in the lush grasslands. In the country, in the fertile fields, let abundant crops be harvested banishing want and poverty. May the moral law prevail in the land and the people prosper under your benign rule for count less aeons, O Irumporai!

Mighty king who leads to battle a powerful triumphant javelin corps! As you are devoted to the moral law, your subjects adore you all the time and those that live the life ideal to inherit eternal life also praise you and wish you well: for these reasons, may you live a healthy and abundant life! Avoiding any transgression of the principles of governance, may you triumph in the field of battle! May those who bear great love to you on no occasion feel offended!

Always together and never apart even in dreams, may you and your queen, the lady with well-dressed glossy hair that shines with the cream that never dries up with shining forehead and such chastity as reminds one of *Arundhati* who is looked upon as the ideal of chaste womanhood by the bride at the wedding and then later on is looked up to as the measuring rod of the length of the span of their lives, may you and the queen, free all the time from fell disease, live lives of fullness, of beauty, joy and abundance!

90

YOU belong to the proud lineage of Mãntharan, O noble King! When he ruled over the Chērā land as a just and efficient statesman-king, the stars and planets kept to their orbits as harbingers of the common good, and seasonal rains did never fail the Chērā country and the king was looked upon by his subjects as the fearless protector of them all. Calamities that befall a state disappeared from the scene and happiness and contentment everywhere did rule the land.

The king imbibed all the learning that is laid down for the ruling class; and when the vassals ignoring all the famed feats of your fighting men, rushed to war with shining swords, they were worsted in the field of battle. The vanquished vassals paid tribute in the form of elephants and jewels of gold and, submissive, asked what service they should do for you, reminding you how in the past they always had been your model vassals.

The sovereign ruling over wide domains rendered justice and played it straight so that his fame that was reinforced by all these traits, rare and noble, kept on waxing and spread in all the four directions — his fame immortal! The king was just in times of peace and brave and mighty in times of war, making the good rejoice in him — such was your forebear, Mãntharan from whom you sprang, Irumporai!

You resemble water, for your mind is filled with a universal love! Your powers of thinking are limitless even like the expanse of the firmament! Your wealth registers no diminution even like the waters of the shoreless sea! Like the moon that shines amidst a myriad stars you appear resplendent amidst your kin possessed of all good propensities.

Your ancestors did never fail to offer worship to the martial Goddess of awesome aspect, who sits on the hill. Your forebears drove the foemen back, those that offered battle at sea, owing their triumph to their javelins. They fought off the enemy in the land destroying his martial might and laid seige to and seized the forts which he had built in the hills and the plains and the wealth

they seized as the booty of war, the limitless wealth, was given away to those in need and to many of them, earning the widest approbation. You are a scion of such a line!

You are the lord of the Kongu people who prefer for their food boiled beans to which has been added jaggery. You are the monarch of Kuttanād where liquor is quaffed along with the food. You are as it were, the protective shield for the strong-shouldered men of the *Pūzhi* land who scorn making war on those of the foeman who, in a previous engagement, had been worsted and had fled the field. You are the overlord of those that live in *Marandai* on the shore of the raging sea. You lead the fighters who reside in many a war-camp, ringing with a babel of tongues — the battle camp overgrown with the *vēlai* creeper with its white bloom and the *sūrai* creeper.

How great is your fame! Your armed forces are limitless like the ocean, and more, they cannot be stopped by the forces of the foe. Your large hands that bend the bow of wondrous strength and rare design on your chest, do bear the scars of the bowstring harshly stroking the skin, how big and powerful, how comely are they! Your shoulders are raised and powerfully built; you ride a horse, of the fleetest feet with its sides covered by draping cloth which ends in lace-work full of gems stitched into it and bright as stars, and a crest of combed *kavari* hair that oscillates in a graceful manner.

Your fighters aiming javelins with the long handle at the foes note the anguish which they cause them and want to aim more javelins even at the greatest personal risk, being strengthened in their resolve to go on fighting, by their firm belief that our tenure here is so uncertain, that these worldly things are transient!

The fertile basin wrought and fed by the river *Cāuvery* resounds to the din of farmers working in the fields playing on the drum, at which peacocks that reside in the plains begin to dance, mistaking the sound for that of thunder. Those that indulge in water sports set up a roar that mixes with the din of the drum on which the fighters who take part in fierce encounters play and with the roar in a different timbre from the bulls raised in opulent homes.

Such are the plains on the banks of the river with many rich towns and many cool fields.

Your queen looks even like the basin of the *Cāuvery* — the queen adorned with fine jewels, specially tinklers with wondrous designs carved on them, and hair that attracts swarms of bees with her conduct controlled in accord with chastity and the moral law never giving way to bouts of anger, never once swerving from rectitude thus acquiring a reputation that shines effulgent before all the world!

O King, blessed with divine virtues, in computing your longevity, let a whole month count even as a day and a whole year as a single month and the normal life span of mortal men count but as a single year for you and your own life span, O mighty King extend limitless over a whole aeon! O King with war drums that dominate the battlefield with their thunderous din and a corps of mighty pachyderms, I have come bursting with eager desire to feast my eyes by looking on your own person, your matchless pelf and your rare and divine qualities!